

Russia Votes to Move Forward

by Elena Bashkirova

Although 78 candidates were nominated for the Russian presidency this past spring, it was obvious that few would actually collect the minimum signatures required to appear on the ballot (11 candidates appeared). However, the number of aspirants spoke volumes about the socio-psychological, economic and political crises Russia is experiencing. The breakdown of the USSR and the formation of a new economy have been followed by societal fragmentation and resulting power struggles among numerous groups. Russian society is experiencing painful shifts in social class following changes in financial status, political outlook and fundamental life values. This presidential election provided a critical test of whether this infant democracy would move forward or go backward.

Tracking the Election

From March through late June the ROMIR Group monitored the ratings of the nominated candidates. During March and April, polls were conducted bi-weekly and weekly beginning in May.¹ The results of the surveys were broadcast over one of Russia's most popular independent TV channels—NTV, which commissioned the survey work—in its weekly analytical program *Itogy*.

The monitoring made clear that two rounds of the election would be necessary. Neither of the major candidates—Boris Yeltsin or Gennady Zyuganov—would be able to collect the majority support required to win the election in the first round. From early March to mid-April Zyuganov regularly rated 6 to 9% higher than Yeltsin. However, by late April each candidate garnered 28% support, and by May Yeltsin's rating was regularly higher than that of the Communist leader. In ROMIR's final measurement before the first election, Yeltsin had moved 6% ahead of his rival (34% vs. 28%).

As for other major candidates in the race, the ratings over the tracking period of Grigory Yavlinsky of the Yabloko bloc, Alexander Lebed of the Congress of Russian Communities, and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia were stable and relatively low.

“ *Yeltsin should be admired and recognized as a fighter. In a relatively short period he won back the confidence of the electorate, renewed public concern over the consequences of a Communist restoration, and, by a mighty spurt, overtook Zyuganov.* ”

The results of the first round of the presidential election on June 16 confirmed the pre-election survey results:

Round One

Willing to vote for:	ROMIR Survey Results	Actual Vote
Yeltsin	34%	35%
Zyuganov	28	32
Lebed	8	15
Yavlinsky	7	7
Zhirinovskiy	5	6

Note: Only the top five candidates are shown.

Source: Survey by the ROMIR Group, June 10, 1996.

Round One

With more than 50% voting for a non-Communist candidate, it was obvious that those supporting reform had won the first round. However, given the number of democracy-oriented candidates, it was practically impossible for Yeltsin to secure majority support in the first election.

Of no less importance was the turnout. ROMIR surveys indicated that pro-Communist supporters were more mobile and energized to vote for a continuing shift to the left. Non-Communist supporters, facing huge doubts and questioning the current reform efforts, were unsure and thus less likely to vote. ROMIR's last pre-election survey predicted a turnout of 85%; however, only 70% came to the polls. It is likely that a higher turnout would have translated into more votes for Yeltsin.

Given the turnout and the drain Yavlinsky, Lebed and Zhirinovskiy put on Yeltsin's support throughout the election and on election day, Yeltsin should be admired and recognized as a fighter. In a relatively short period he won back the confidence of the electorate, renewed public concern over the consequences of a Communist restoration, and, by a mighty spurt, overtook Zyuganov.

The Russian Electorate

Using poll data and the results of the State Duma elections held this past December, the political orientation of the Russian electorate falls conventionally into five groups: leftists, centrists, democrats, national-patriots and passive electors (those consistently refusing to vote).

Public Opinion Abroad

Using this classification to examine Yeltsin's vote (35%) in the first round, 15% came from the centrists, 7% from the democrats (Yavlinsky collected the other 7%), 7% from the passive electors (those who did not vote in the State Duma elections in 1995), and approximately 6% from the national-patriots. Of the 32% casting a ballot for Zyuganov, roughly 23% came from the leftists and 9% from the national-patriots.

In addition to the differences in support Yeltsin and Zyuganov received based on political orientation, supporters also differ on a number of demographic characteristics:

* Yeltsin's supporters are younger than those of the Communist Party leader. 18-29 year olds comprise 23% of Yeltsin's support, while only 9% of Zyuganov's support comes from this group.

* Yeltsin's supporters have a higher level of education (post-secondary education—18% for Yeltsin vs. 15% for Zyuganov, secondary education—59% vs. 47%, primary education—23% vs. 38%, respectively).

* There are more professionals among Yeltsin's supporters (12% vs. 8%), more government officers (14% vs. 10%), more directors/managers (8% vs. 2%), and more students (5% vs. 0.3%). Zyuganov's support is primarily pensioners (46% vs. 25%).

* Yeltsin's supporters generally have a higher income level (e.g., those with an average monthly income over \$180—30% of Yeltsin supporters vs. 15% for Zyuganov).

* In all regions where a majority of the population voted for Zyuganov, income per household member and living standards were consistently lower than aver-

age, and debts due to non-payment of wages and salaries were higher.

Round Two

Even though the results of polls prior to the runoff favored Yeltsin's leadership ability (51% vs. 41%), reform supporters could not relax. With wide-sweeping propaganda campaigns launched by the Communists, a Yeltsin victory was not assured. However, President Yeltsin demonstrated his skill in political maneuvering and negotiation. Prior to the runoff the presidential team underwent radical transformations: Lebed was appointed Secretary of the Security Council, assistant to the President on national security issues; and a number of Yeltsin appointees—the Minister for Defense, Director of the Federal Security Service, Head of the President Security Service, and the Vice-Premier—were ousted. Also, first-round candidates Lebed, Zhirinovskiy and, with certain reservations, Yavlinsky appealed to their supporters to vote for Yeltsin.

Of those surveyed just prior to the election, 53% of those who voted for Lebed in round one planned to vote for Yeltsin, 16% for Zyuganov and 6% against both.

Sixty-five percent of Yavlinsky's supporters were going to vote for Yeltsin, 5% for Zyuganov and 10% intended to vote against both.

Both Yeltsin and Zyuganov drew roughly one-third of the Zhirinovskiy voters, while 18% of Zhirinovskiy's supporters intended to vote against both.

Of crucial importance was how many voters would cast a ballot in the runoff. A week prior to the election ROMIR predicted that roughly 65% of the electorate would vote (in fact, the number was 67%). With non-Communi-

nists less likely to turn out, Yeltsin's victory could not be guaranteed if less than 60% voted.

ROMIR's predictions for the runoff were quite accurate:

Round Two

Willing to vote for:	ROMIR Survey Results	Actual Vote
Yeltsin	51%	54%
Zyuganov	41	41
Against both	8	5

Source: Survey by the ROMIR Group, June 25, 1996.

The Aftermath

Thus, the election has been held and this is a common victory for all of Russia, for the decision on the country's direction was determined by ballot, not force.

Yeltsin's re-election, achieved by a democratic vote, gives a great chance to reform supporters to make necessary changes and to avoid new mistakes. The unprecedented confidence in the leadership that has taken so many wrong steps over the years of reform is likely to turn into unprecedented dissatisfaction if the electorate's trust is betrayed. For now, we will have to wait and see.

Endnote:

¹ The surveys used a representative sample of Russian adults 18 years and older. Both urban and rural populations were sampled using 160 sampling points covering 39 regions and republics. Sample size was 1,500 with a margin of error of +/- 4%.

PP

Elena Bashkirova is managing director, the ROMIR Group, a Russian-based survey organization