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## *Yeltsin and Russia Reborn*

**B**oris Yeltsin's action against the Congress of People's Deputies had been bold but not decisive. Russia got a new constitution, a stronger presidency, a new legislature, and a promise of immediate elections to the newly created Federal Assembly and, in the near future, new presidential elections as well. But in other areas, little changed. Some, but not all, of those promises would be kept. The Duma, the lower house of the new Federal Assembly, elected in December 1993, continued to be hostile to Yeltsin and his reform agenda; the next legislative election, held in 1995 when the truncated term of the first Duma ran out, was somewhat less hostile, but the legislative and executive branches remained strikingly at odds on most points. The promise to advance the date of the next presidential election was not kept.

The new draft constitution was ratified by a popular referendum held on December 12, 1993, and went into force on December 25, two years to the day since Gorbachev's resignation. Voter turnout was surprisingly low. A 50-percent turnout was required for the referendum to be valid. Only 55 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, and there were unsubstantiated claims that election officials had inflated the figure to avoid a second ballot. Of those who voted, just over 58 percent approved the new document.

Under the old order, there was no real distinction between the legislative and executive functions of government. In constitutional terms, Yeltsin was eager to separate the two. But he resisted the creation of effective checks and balances. The new constitution therefore created an institutional structure in which the presidency was given exceptional powers to run the country in the absence of agreement with the legislature. In a perfect world, agreement between the two branches was the preferred state of affairs. But the realities of post-communist Russia seemed to stack the deck against such accord, at least in the short run.

Relations between the central and regional governments were crafted to reflect the same balance of power and authority. Yeltsin, who had urged that the republics break away from the central government of the now-defunct Soviet Union, found himself facing regional authorities who demanded greater latitude within the Russian Federation. The undeniable reality was that Moscow was weaker in terms of its control over regional authorities than it had been for nearly two centuries.

After considering a number of possible constitutional models, including the U.S. presidential system, Yeltsin and his advisors chose the mixed presidential-parliamentary system of the French Fifth Republic. Created by Charles de Gaulle, who was its first and unarguably strongest president, the Fifth Republic was born in the midst of political crisis and near civil war and contained many of the features that Yeltsin wanted: a strong president, eventually directly elected and with reserve powers to rule in the case of legislative inaction or deadlock between the legislative and executive branches; a viable but presumably badly divided legislature, at least if the Third and Fourth Republics were any guide; an upper house, weaker but chosen to speak for the regions; a relatively weak judicial branch; and—so everyone anticipated—a bitterly divided multiparty system that militated against the creation of stable majorities in the lower house of the legislature. As it turned out, only part of this vision was true. Although the institutional structure remained essentially the same, two unanticipated realities changed the way in which French politics operated, both during de Gaulle's tenure in office and under his successors.

First, the party system stabilized in a way never possible under the Third and Fourth Republics; although many smaller parties remained, the overall configuration gelled into a reasonably stable coalition between the center-right and the center-left. The former was led by the Gaullist party itself, which initially came together because of de Gaulle's personal dominance in the early years of the Fifth Republic but continued after his resignation in 1969 as a pragmatic alliance of center-right forces. To a lesser degree, the left fell into line behind (or at least grudgingly cooperated with) the Socialist Party, although the Communist Party found it difficult to reach any lasting accommodation.

The other unanticipated reality that shaped the Fifth Republic and made it an attractive model for Yeltsin to follow was the dominant role played by de Gaulle himself. What characterized the Fifth Republic was not just the creation of a strong presidency as an institution but also the fact that de Gaulle held the post for ten years. In retrospect, it seems that he was

destined to play that role, but he had earlier abandoned the Fourth Republic and gone into self-imposed political exile largely because it failed to respond to his leadership. When the Fifth Republic was created, there were no guarantees that it would not produce the same results. What made the difference was de Gaulle's ability to reach beyond the conventional political establishment to create a new center-right coalition and to use the reserve powers of the presidency such as direct referenda to frame issues as a choice between stability or a return to the political gridlock of the past.<sup>1</sup>

For Yeltsin, of course, this sort of mixed presidential-parliamentary system offered attractive options. Beyond the institutional features of the system, this configuration fit his own concept of how he wished to lead the nation. Like the French presidency, its Russian counterpart was, in a way, "above" politics—at least in terms of narrow partisan interests and squabbling among parties and legislative factions. Yeltsin saw himself as standing apart from the day-to-day ebb and flow of political combat. It fit Yeltsin's style of dramatic confrontation and disinterest in the details of government. In *Midnight Diaries*, Yeltsin bragged that "[n]obody has ever been able to force me to play by his rules," an attitude that aptly summed up his hope to continue to play the dominant role, as had de Gaulle, in his republic.<sup>2</sup> Boris's constitution, Boris's rules. . . .

It didn't completely work out that way, of course, because there were major differences between the Russian and French experiences. Most important was the fact that Yeltsin wasn't de Gaulle. For a host of reasons discussed in this chapter, Yeltsin led with an unsteady hand. Whereas de Gaulle had been *above* politics, a posture that bespoke stability and disdain for partisanship, Yeltsin was frequently *away from* politics, which produced a vacuum in the nation's political life.

Just as significant was the reality that no stable party emerged to underpin Yeltsin's rule, either within the legislature or as a liaison to an institutionalized grassroots movement. The "parties of power" cobbled together for legislative or presidential elections were temporary affairs. Above politics, Yeltsin also was above party identity, a posture that permitted him greater latitude at key moments such as the 1996 presidential election but also cost him in terms of the practical advantages of a continuing grassroots organization, a significant liability since the newly reconstituted Communist Party of the Russian Federation retained a significant part of its old structure.

A word about Yeltsin the man also is appropriate. The old Boris was still there in many ways. Pugnacious, confrontational, and convinced that

the best defense was a good offense, little of his style changed when he was on his game. But over the balance of his first term, and throughout his second term, he was less and less on his game. Less frequent would be those moments of focus and discipline, and more frequent would be long stretches of withdrawal, depression, ill health, and, by his own admission, excessive drinking, which he finally brought under control. At times he showed—at least for him—a remarkable willingness to compromise with the still-hostile legislature, especially over the appointment of mutually acceptable prime ministers like Viktor Chernomyrdin. Perhaps fearing another constitutional crisis, the Duma responded in kind, most of the time. And at times, despite ill health and depression, he roused himself to be the old Boris. If his finest moments had come atop a tank in 1991 and in standing his ground against the Congress of People's Deputies in 1993, he rose to stage an equally impressive last hurrah in his literally death-defying campaign for a second term in 1996.

He was a better underdog than winner. He knew that about himself and bragged repeatedly that he was at his best in moments of crisis or near defeat, whether in sports, the crisis-ridden construction industry, or politics.<sup>3</sup> He relied on this aspect of his personality to move mountains, a strategy that worked more often than not.

But with victory secured, Yeltsin frequently would retreat into isolation and disinterest. In his later years, some of this could be attributed to worsening health. But even if we allow for that, he still seemed to lose interest and focus, never moving to consolidate his victories or acquire lasting advantage, especially if it meant personally dealing with the day-to-day management of the state or the organization of an institutionalized political base. He never quite put it this way, but the truth was that he bored easily, leading him to hand over the lesser tasks of governance to others. Sometimes that worked quite well if the aides or prime ministers were talented (Yegor Gaidar, who implemented economic reforms) or smoothed the waters separating the president from his enemies (Chernomyrdin, who on two occasions brought both personal competence and political experience to the office of prime minister, and Yevgeny Primakov, probably the most talented and politically skilled of Yeltsin's prime ministers). But aides and prime ministers would come and go frequently, sacrificed as politics sometimes demands or sacked simply because Yeltsin lost confidence in them. But near the end, the quality of the new appointees seriously deteriorated, and Yeltsin, now less personally able to take control, countenanced the emergence of a strong kitchen cabinet of advisors, with his daughter, Tatiana Diachenko, and his own personal security chief, Alexander Korzhakov, playing key roles.

## The Presidency and the Legislature

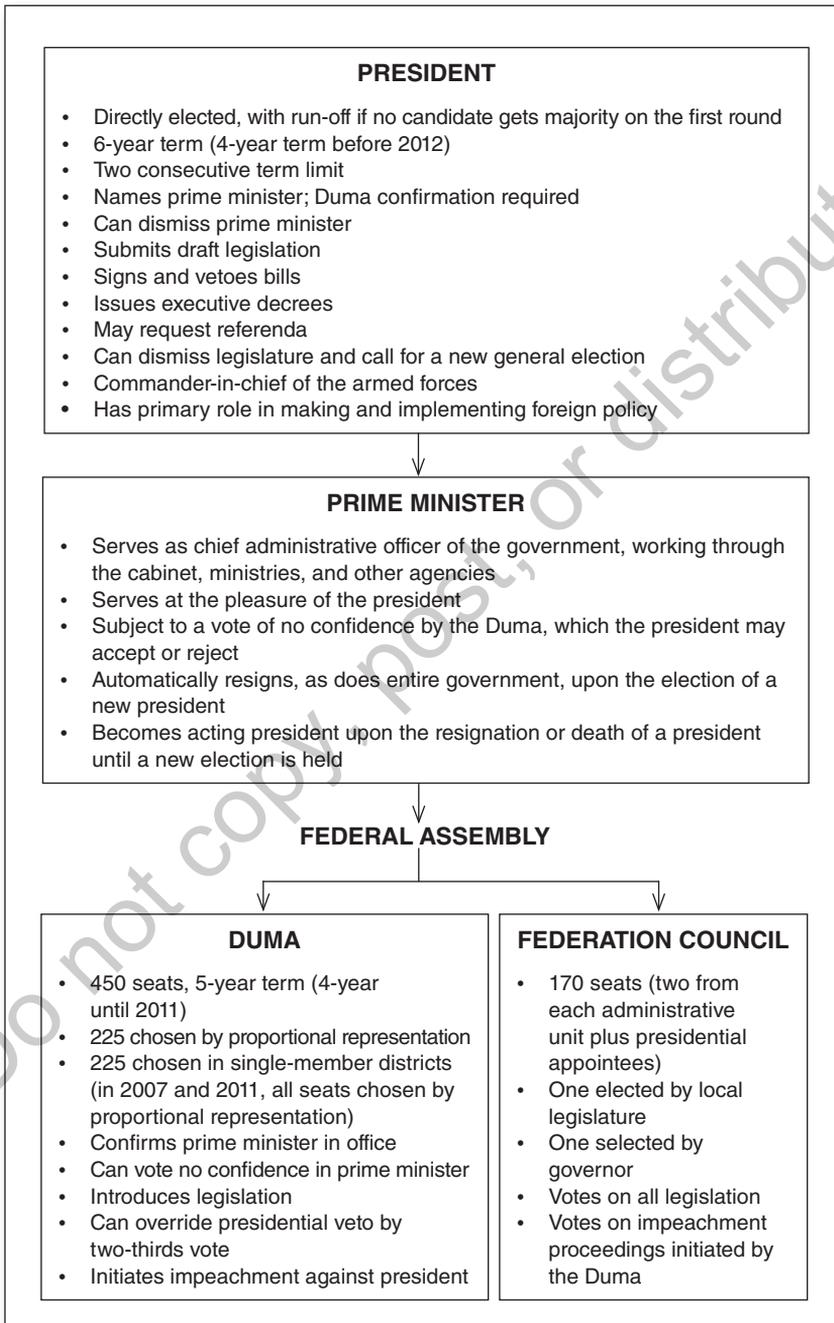
The 1993 constitution created a new political battleground whose institutional features were to shape Russian political life. Although the organizational chart presented in Figure 4.1 suggests a very simple division of power and responsibility, reality is far more complex. In a way, both the presidency and the legislature are still works in progress. The new legislature, the Federal Assembly, is bicameral. The upper house, called the Federation Council, is designed to reflect the federal structure of the Russian state; two delegates are selected from each of Russia's regions. At first, one delegate was chosen by the local legislature, the other by the local governor, although that arrangement would change in coming years. Delegates initially served a four-year term.

The Federation Council's primary responsibilities lie in the areas of interregional affairs and national security. It approves border changes between regions; approves presidential decrees on the creation of a state of emergency; "decide(s) on the possibility of using the armed forces of the Russian Federation beyond its territory," a purposely vague and hence meaningless charge; schedules presidential elections; appoints various federal officials; and, potentially most significant, hears impeachment charges brought by the Duma against the president.

The lower house, the popularly elected Duma, enjoys significantly greater powers. It contains 450 members. Initially 225 were elected in single-member districts and 225 from party lists. No party with less than 5 percent of the party list votes got seats. The original arrangement—a loose copy of the German system—was intended to reflect the reality that political parties had not yet taken hold by 1993. The result, at least in the early years, was the election of a significant number of independents drawn from local bailiwicks, making it difficult to cobble together majorities on the floor of the Duma.

On paper, the powers of the legislature seem impressive. The Duma must approve the president's choice for prime minister and may undertake a vote of no confidence against any incumbent (but if successful, the vote affects only the prime minister, not the president). If the legislature refuses three times to accept the nominee, the president may dissolve the Duma and call for new elections. Not surprisingly, this created an undefined sparring ground between the president and a willful legislature, although both would usually step away from confrontation at the last minute and find a compromise that left both claiming at least partial victory.

Figure 4.1 Russian Government



SOURCE: Compiled by the author.

Should the Duma pass a vote of no confidence against the prime minister, the president has a number of options. He may simply ignore the legislature's action; the Duma's only recourse is to pass the same vote of no confidence three times within two months, which will force the president to take action. The president may then respond in one of two ways: He may either submit a new nominee, subject to the Duma's confirmation, or dissolve the legislature itself, resulting in new elections. Needless to say, cooler heads usually prevailed at the last moment, leading to a face-saving compromise.

The Duma's greatest powers emerge from its normal function of law making. As noted in the following, the dual executive system envisioned a division of labor between the president and the prime minister. The president would be responsible for the big picture, charting the nation's course of action and submitting important legislation, while the prime minister would be responsible for securing its passage through the Duma and its ultimate implementation through the government bureaucracy, of which he is the nominal head. Success therefore depended on two things: agreement between the president and the prime minister, and the latter's ability to get legislation through the Duma. That meant being an effective floor manager who could pull together enough votes in a badly divided and hostile legislature. Political reality therefore gave the Duma considerable leverage against Yeltsin, whose years in power were characterized by an internally divided Duma, a weak party structure, and continuing friction between the president and the legislature.<sup>4</sup>

Potential power also lies in the Duma's right to initiate the impeachment of the president, although the process is long and difficult. First, the Duma has to bring a charge of high treason or other serious crimes against the president. These charges have to be supported by two thirds of the deputies, based on the recommendation of a specially constituted Duma commission. Should the Duma vote to pursue impeachment, the Supreme Court has to affirm that the elements of a crime were present, and the Constitutional Court has to confirm that the Duma has followed the proper impeachment proceedings. The matter then goes to the Federation Council, which can convict the president by a two-thirds vote, provided that the action is completed within three months of the Duma's first indictment. Given this complexity, impeachment is hardly a sword of Damocles hanging over any president's head.

The Duma does have some constitutional protections against capricious presidential action. The president cannot dissolve it within the first year of its term, even if it twice votes no confidence in the government. Nor can he dissolve it until an impeachment process has run its course or

during a period of emergency rule or martial law, states that may be invoked by the president.

It is the presidency, however, that is the real cornerstone of the 1993 constitution. It has evolved over its relatively short history toward a consolidation of power increasingly into the hands of the president and, in the broader federal context, the central government in Moscow.

Whatever the course of that evolution, it started with the 1993 constitution and Yeltsin's frustration with the leftovers of the soviet era. The presidency was to be his mechanism of rule. In the best of worlds, it would work in tandem with the legislature and with regional governments to sort through the issues and disputes involved in redesigning the nation from the ground up. But under less auspicious circumstances, the president would have the ability to force everyone to play the game by new rules. And, as recent history had confirmed, he was just the man to rise to such an occasion.

The list of presidential powers and advantages is impressive, with some limitations:

- The president is directly elected and thus receives a clear public mandate; in the event that no one wins a majority on the first round of voting, a runoff election is held between the top two, guaranteeing that a plurality-elected administration would never take office.
- The president "determines the basic guidelines for . . . domestic and foreign policy," thus confirming his far-reaching powers and his status as "above" politics.
- The president nominates the prime minister, who will function as his liaison to the Duma and director of the day-to-day administrative activities of government; if the Duma refuses to confirm the president's choice in three separate ballots, the president may dissolve the assembly and call for new legislative elections.
- The president may dismiss the government, including the prime minister and the cabinet, who serve at his pleasure.
- The president, in consultation with the prime minister, names the other members of the cabinet and the deputy premiers.
- The president names the director of the State Bank and may propose the director's dismissal.
- The president nominates justices of the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, and the Higher Court of Arbitration, subject to confirmation by the Federation Council.
- The president names the members of and chairs the Security Council, which plays an important but not exclusive role in determining foreign and military policy and the maintenance of public order at home.

- The president “confirms” the military doctrine of the nation and acts as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
- The president appoints representatives to oversee regional and local governments, a mechanism that Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin used with increasing success to rein in the de facto devolution of power to the regions.
- The president may request public referenda, subject to certain restrictions imposed by federal constitutional law.
- The president may dissolve the Duma and schedule new elections, subject to certain restrictions.
- The president may submit draft legislation.
- The president signs all federal laws, thus granting the president veto power that could be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both the Duma and the Federation Council.
- The president may suspend the decisions of regional government if he judges them to be at variance with the constitution, subject to post facto confirmation by the courts.
- The president “exercises leadership” on foreign policy, thus becoming both the key policy maker and the top diplomat.
- The president may proclaim martial law or states of emergency, requiring “notification” of the Duma and the Federation Council.
- The president may issue presidential decrees and directives that, if constitutional, are binding on regional and local governments.<sup>5</sup>

The presidency clearly had significant powers, but using them was not always easy. All of these powers had to be exercised with the realization that the nation had just gone through a major political crisis and narrowly avoided a civil war. For a while at least, everyone would tread cautiously, posturing when it brought little real danger but drawing back just shy of all-out confrontation. Political realities limited risk taking. For its part, the Duma stopped short of provoking the president to a point at which he would exercise his power to dissolve the assembly and call a new general election. Yeltsin wisely declined to call for referenda, which he had used so successfully before. The dangers of a stunning, although symbolic defeat were just too great for Yeltsin, who had grown so cautious that he withdrew his promise, made during the 1993 constitutional crisis, to hold new presidential elections, now insisting that he would serve out his term until 1996.

## Judicial Reform

The 1993 constitution established three types of courts. The Supreme Court serves at the apex of the courts of general jurisdiction, internally

subdivided to deal with issues of civil, criminal, military, and administrative law, and to handle appeals from lower courts. Consistent with the handling of economic issues during the soviet era, now a growing problem with the privatization of the economy, a system of lower-level commercial arbitration courts and the Supreme Court of Arbitration were established to deal with business and contract disputes.

Most important in political terms is the Constitutional Court. It is responsible for cases dealing with conformity to the constitution; judicial disputes between federal bodies, including the presidency and the legislature; disputes between the central government and the regional authorities; and disputes between regional governments. It has the power of constitutional review of laws passed by the legislature, presidential decrees and directives, local constitutions and charters, and agreements between the central government and the regions, or between the regions themselves. Controversial from its inception, it did not begin its work until February 1995 because the Federation Council, the upper house of the legislature, repeatedly refused to certify the appointment of judges nominated by Yeltsin.<sup>6</sup>

### The 1993 Duma Elections

The elections for the new Duma were paired with the constitutional referendum in December 1993. They were a sobering setback for Yeltsin, whose newly empowered presidency would face off against a distinctly hostile legislature. The biggest winner in the proportional representation voting was the Liberal Democratic Party, led by the charismatic Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (Table 4.1). It was neither liberal nor pro-democracy, but it obviously was popular, drawing support for its nationalistic and anti-Yeltsin stance. It received 22.9 percent of the popular vote, nearly eight points ahead of its closest rival, Russia's Choice. That was enough for fifty-nine seats chosen by party-list voting. Adding another eleven from the single-member-district voting, it held a total of seventy seats in the 450-member Duma.<sup>7</sup>

Russia's Choice ran as the pro-Yeltsin party, although he refused to formally endorse it or to campaign openly for its candidates. It pulled only 15.5 percent of the popular vote, earning it forty seats among those chosen by party-list voting. It got fifty-six more seats in the district voting, for a total of ninety-six. Particularly disappointing was the low level of public support evidenced in the party-list voting. It did better in the district voting because local power brokers, anxious to jump on what they hoped was a

winning bandwagon, backed what they thought would be the next party of power. But the diminished support among rank-and-file voters indicated that Yeltsin was in trouble.

**Table 4.1** 1993 Russian Legislative Election

<i>Party</i>	<i>Proportional Representation</i>	<i>Single-Member-District Voting</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>
Liberal Democratic Party	Votes: 12,318,562 Percentage: 22.9 Seats: 59	Votes: 1,577,400 Percentage: 3.0 Seats: 11	70
Russia's Choice	Votes: 8,339,345 Percentage: 15.5 Seats: 40	Votes: 3,630,799 Percentage: 6.8 Seats: 56	96
Communist Party	Votes: 6,666,402 Percentage: 12.4 Seats: 32	1,848,888 Percentage: 3.5 Seats: 33	65
Women of Russia	Votes: 4,369,918 Percentage: 8.1 Seats: 21	Votes: 309,378 Percentage: 0.6 Seats: 4	25
Agrarian Party	Votes: 4,292,518 Percentage: 8.0 Seats: 21	Votes: 2,877,610 Percentage: 5.4 Seats: 26	47
Yavlinsky-Boldyrev-Lukin bloc (Yabloko)	Votes: 4,223,219 Percentage: 7.9 Seats: 20	Votes: 1,849,120 Percentage: 3.5 Seats: 13	33
Party of Russian Unity and Accord	Votes: 3,620,035 Percentage: 6.7 Seats: 18	Votes: 1,443,454 Percentage: 2.7 Seats: 9	27
Democratic Party	Votes: 2,969,533 Percentage: 5.5 Seats: 14	Votes: 1,094,066 Percentage: 2.1 Seats: 7	21
Russian Democratic Reform Movement	Votes: 2,191,505 Percentage: 4.1 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,083,063 Percentage: 2.0 Seats: 8	8
Civic Union	Votes: 1,038,193 Percentage: 1.9 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,526,115 Percentage: 2.9 Seats: 18	18
Independents		Votes: 25,961,405 Percentage: 48.7 Seats: 30	30

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation came in third, with 12.4 percent of the party-list vote, giving it thirty-two seats; it picked up another thirty-three from the districts, for a total of sixty-five. Newly reconstituted as a social democratic party, the Communist Party received the backing of the former party members who had not reconciled themselves to the new order of things and the growing number of ordinary citizens deeply affected by Yeltsin's economic reforms. It still had considerable advantages in terms of its grassroots organization.

A number of smaller parties trailed behind. Women of Russia got 8.1 percent of the party-list vote, for twenty-one seats, with four more seats from the districts. Next came the Agrarian Party, with 8.0 percent, also for twenty-one seats, with an additional twenty-six from district voting, for a total of forty-seven. It frequently followed the lead of the Communist Party, which it viewed as a natural ally in representing both urban and rural workers.

The pro-democracy parties fared poorly. Largest among them was the so-called Yavlinsky-Boldyrev-Lukin bloc, or Yabloko (all ardent democrats and former Yeltsin allies), with 7.9 percent of the vote, for twenty seats, with another thirteen from the districts. As always, other liberal parties, unable to form effective alliances, divided voters among themselves.

These vote totals fail to tell the whole story. Once seated, delegates sorted themselves into various parliamentary groups or factions that may or may not have been in strict accord with the party labels (if any) under which they ran. At first, an individual delegate could belong to many groups, further muddying the waters. Identification with a group was not necessarily stable over time, and a delegate could follow the lead of different groups on different issues. Party and group discipline was nonexistent. When examined from this perspective, the picture is even more complex. At any time, the Liberal Democratic Party faction could range from 53 to 64 votes, and the Communist Party from 45 to 47. Factions could be formed independently of party identity. Yabloko, with 27 to 29 votes, was never very successful in forging unity among pro-democracy forces. Odd bedfellows emerged frequently, as in the so-called red-brown alliance between the Communist Party and the Liberal Democrats.

The partisan divisions within the Federation Council were harder to discern. Most candidates had run as independents. The best estimates are that Russia's Choice held forty seats, with eight others held by pro-democracy delegates. Moderate reformers held another twenty-three,

and moderate opponents of the regime, many identified with the former Civic Union, thirty-six. The Communist Party and other left-wing parties held twenty seats. The rest of the delegates were militantly independent.

In light of the election returns, Yeltsin moved cautiously. For their part, the leaders of both houses of the legislature responded in kind, and an uneasy peace descended over the land. Yeltsin named Chernomyrdin prime minister, stoking opposition from many in his early reform team who thought he was backing away from his commitments, but reassuring others that the president did not want to provoke another confrontation. In 1994, Yeltsin drafted a “Civic Accord,” a political peace treaty committing all who signed to set aside their differences and seek agreement for two years. In April, almost all the parties signed, some undoubtedly with their fingers crossed behind their backs. Absent, however, were the Communist Party and its ally, the Agrarian Party, and Yabloko, the home of those who now criticized Yeltsin from the left.<sup>8</sup>

With the new constitution and a largely hostile legislature in place, Yeltsin moved to extend his reach through the creation of a larger presidential staff and a series of agencies that operated under his control, independent of legislative oversight. Most important was the Security Council, a sort of inner cabinet containing representatives of the “power” ministries that controlled national defense, foreign policy, intelligence, and internal security. Also significant was the expansion of the presidential apparatus, which by 1994 numbered over 2,000 people in Moscow alone, and extended its influence throughout the nation.<sup>9</sup>

If the office of the presidency were growing stronger, its incumbent was not. As he had done so many times before, Yeltsin withdrew into himself, shutting out all but a few trusted cronies like his security chief, Khorzhakov, and his daughter, Tatiana. Absences from his Kremlin office grew longer, and he did less and less even at his favorite dacha. He became increasingly despondent, potentially even suicidal. And he drank more and more, despite attempts by his inner circle to nudge him away from the bottle. Boris Yeltsin, who had willed himself to stand up against seemingly impossible odds in the past, was now on a downward spiral.<sup>10</sup>

## The 1995 Duma Elections

In the spring of 1995, Yeltsin attempted to stabilize the field for the approaching legislative elections by fostering the creation of two broad

coalitions. One would appeal to center-left forces and capture votes from Yabloko and the other reformist parties as well as the more moderate elements of the Communist Party. The other would be a center-right coalition that could lure votes from right-wing and nationalist groups like the Liberal Democratic Party and the new Congress of Russian Communities, led by Alexander Lebed, commander of Russian forces in Moldova, as well as from the growing business community. The center-left coalition would be led by Ivan Rybkin, speaker of the Duma, and the center-right group by Chernomyrdin, the prime minister.

The December elections were a confirmation of the growing disorder of Russian politics in general and of Yeltsin's declining popularity in particular. Over 270 political parties started out to collect the needed number of signatures to be included in the ballot, and 43 succeeded. These included the obvious players—Our Home Is Russia, which advanced Yeltsin's agenda of reform and would aid Chernomyrdin's hopes for eventually claiming the top post; the Communist Party, which led in the preelection polls and was critical of Yeltsin across the board; Yabloko, which argued for more rapid reform and an end to the war in Chechnya (discussed later in the chapter); the Congress of Russian Communities, which advocated nationalist causes and greater protection of the 25 million ethnic Russians now living in the other states created by the breakup of the Soviet Union; and the Liberal Democratic Party, which backed a nationalist and antireform platform (Table 4.2).

The results were a disaster for Yeltsin. The Communist Party was the biggest winner, taking 22.3 percent of the popular vote, for ninety-nine seats, and another fifty-eight in the single-member districts. Overall it went from sixty-five seats in the 1993 Duma to 157 in the new body, an increase of ninety-two seats. The Liberal Democratic Party came in second, dropping to 11.2 percent of the vote, for fifty party-list seats, and adding only one from the districts. It lost nineteen seats from the 1993 Duma. Our Home Is Russia, most clearly identified with the defense of the Yeltsin government, came in third, with 10.1 percent of the popular vote, for forty-five seats, with another ten from district balloting. Compared with Russia's Choice, the pro-Yeltsin party in the 1993 balloting, its popular support dropped by 5.4 percent in the proportional representation voting. Overall it lost forty-one seats. Yabloko got 6.9 percent of the popular vote, making it the last party to cross the 5-percent cutoff. That was enough to give it thirty-one party-list seats, with fourteen more from the district voting.<sup>11</sup>

Table 4.2 1995 Russian Legislative Election

<i>Party</i>	<i>Proportional Representation</i>	<i>Single-Member-District Voting</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>
Communist Party	Votes: 15,432,963 Percentage: 22.3 Seats: 99	Votes: 8,636,392 Percentage: 12.8 Seats: 58	157
Liberal Democratic Party	Votes: 7,737,431 Percentage: 11.2 Seats: 50	Votes: 3,801,971 Percentage: 5.6 Seats: 1	51
Our Home Is Russia	Votes: 7,009,291 Percentage: 10.1 Seats: 45	Votes: 3,808,745 Percentage: 5.6 Seats: 10	55
Yabloko	Votes: 4,767,384 Percentage: 6.9 Seats: 31	Votes: 2,209,945 Percentage: 3.3 Seats: 14	45
Women of Russia	Votes: 3,188,813 Percentage: 4.6 Seats: 0	Votes: 712,072 Percentage: 1.1 Seats: 3	3
Communists and Working Russia	Votes: 3,137,406 Percentage: 4.5 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,276,655 Percentage: 1.9 Seats: 1	1
Congress of Russian Communities	Votes: 2,980,137 Percentage: 4.3 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,987,665 Percentage: 2.9 Seats: 5	5
Party of Workers' Self-Government	Votes: 2,756,954 Percentage: 4.0 Seats: 0	Votes: 475,007 Percentage: 0.7 Seats: 1	1
Democratic Choice–United Democrats	Votes: 2,674,084 Percentage: 3.9 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,819,330 Percentage: 2.7 Seats: 9	9
Agrarian Party	Votes: 2,613,127 Percentage: 3.8 Seats: 0	Votes: 4,066,214 Percentage: 6.0 Seats: 20	20
Forward Russia	Votes: 1,343,428 Percentage: 1.9 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,054,577 Percentage: 1.6 Seats: 3	3
Power to the People	Votes: 1,112,873 Percentage: 1.6 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,345,905 Percentage: 2.0 Seats: 9	9
Independents		Votes: 21,620,835 Percentage: 32 Seats: 77	77

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

The creation of parliamentary groups sorted things out quite a bit, but certainly not to Yeltsin's advantage. The Communist Party bloc numbered 157 members, and its Agrarian Group ally, twenty, giving them the largest plurality in the Duma. Our Home Is Russia, the pro-Yeltsin coalition, and its allies came in second with only sixty-five seats. Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic bloc was third with fifty-one seats. That gave the "red-brown coalition" that frequently cooperated in the first Duma even greater power in the second. Yabloko, the only staunchly liberal party, was next, with forty-five seats.

### The 1996 Presidential Election

Yeltsin made up his mind to run for reelection in December 1995, shortly after the Duma balloting.<sup>12</sup> It would be an uphill struggle, as the president and his advisors all knew. Despite the advantages of incumbency and the memory that twice before, in 1991 and 1993, Yeltsin had risked all to salvage his hopes for reform, the prospects were bleak. His popularity rating was in the single digits, a victim of the stalemated war in Chechnya and economic difficulties. He had withdrawn from public view, sulking in depression and growing alcoholism, with his absences unconvincingly explained away by a "cold" or a "sore throat." In truth, his health had deteriorated substantially and would continue to do so throughout the campaign. His few public appearances or trips abroad were filled with embarrassing lapses, a hardly reassuring omen that he could mount an effective comeback.

On February 15, 1996, Yeltsin journeyed to his home base in Ekaterinburg to announce his candidacy in the June election. From the beginning, his advisors were bitterly divided over campaign strategy or even whether the election should be held. First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets was in charge initially. Working in tandem with Korzhakov, head of the president's security force and regarded as the *éminence grise* behind Yeltsin, they argued openly for a postponement of the election, perhaps coupled with a behind-the-scenes deal with the Communists to form a *de facto* coalition to rule the nation. On the other side of the issue were Anatoly Chubais, the moving spirit behind economic reforms who had been twice sacrificed for reasons of political expediency; Yeltsin's daughter, Tatiana; and a growing number of first-generation oligarchs who had made vast fortunes in the early economic reforms and were anxious to keep the Yeltsin ship afloat. Control over the campaign shifted gradually to the latter pro-election group, despite the risks. Under their guidance,

Boris would be Boris once again, dynamic, confrontational, and the harbinger of a frightening choice: It's me or a return to the past.<sup>13</sup>

The field of candidates was crowded. Seventy-eight candidates initially announced their intention to run, and seventeen actually collected the one million signatures needed to be listed on the ballot. Four of those were removed from contention by an election commission that allegedly found fraud in their applications, and others fell by the wayside. A number of the remaining eleven officially on the ballot were hardly serious choices, including a wealthy businessman who offered to run the country like a business, a former Olympic weightlifter and ultranationalist, and an eye surgeon.

Other candidates had more serious credentials. Zhirinovskiy, whose Liberal Democratic Party had slipped in the Duma elections, was back again, as was Gennady Zyuganov, making another bid as head of the Communist Party. Grigory Yavlinsky, head of Yabloko, ran also. The most significant newcomer was Alexander Lebed, head of the Congress of Russian Communities and a strong supporter of nationalist causes, especially the fate of the large ethnic Russian communities now located in the former republics of the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev ran too in a last-ditch bid to salvage some level of public recognition and support.

Despite their common interest in blocking a first-round victory by Yeltsin, opposition candidates found it difficult to form an effective coalition. Long negotiations over the creation of such a coalition eventually faltered, primarily because no opposition leader was willing to stand aside in deference to another.

Yeltsin's most serious challenge came from Zyuganov, who ran at the head of a coalition called the People's Patriotic Bloc, a marriage of convenience linking the Communist Party with a number of smaller pro-communist or nationalist groups. Communist popularity had been demonstrated by the 1995 Duma elections, but it was another matter to translate it into a victory for the stiff and uncharismatic Zyuganov. Eventually Lebed clandestinely broke the deadlock; late in May he struck a secret deal with Yeltsin to throw his support to the incumbent in the second round, receiving in turn support for his campaign and a promise of a high-level appointment after the election. A similar round of talks with Yavlinsky, who was less likely to become the second-round kingmaker, collapsed over the issue of Chernomyrdin's continuing role in a postelection government.

In late spring, Yeltsin began to make a comeback in the public opinion polls. He was now vigorously campaigning, at considerable risk to his health. His central message was simple: It's me or a return to the Communists.

Combining contrition with old-fashioned pork-barrel politics, he made thirty-three campaign trips outside Moscow. He offered greater power to regional officials; loans to small businesses; payment of wage arrears to workers; increased pensions; aid to agriculture; compensation for inflation-riddled savings; in short, whatever it took, including a temporary cease-fire in Chechnya. He made a special effort to appeal to young voters, whose level of turnout might determine the race.

It worked. In the first round of balloting on Sunday, June 16, Yeltsin got 35.8 percent of the vote, with Zyuganov following at 32.5 percent, Lebed at 14.7 percent, Yavlinsky at 7.4 percent, and Zhirinovskiy at 5.8 percent. Gorbachev, in his final bid for political redemption, got 0.5 percent (Table 4.3).

The stage was now set for a runoff between Yeltsin and Zyuganov, scheduled for Wednesday, July 3, a workday, which might cut back on blue-collar turnout. The choice was now black and white, and Yeltsin exploited it to the hilt. Television documentaries reminded viewers of the worst of the old soviet era—repression, stagnation, and Stalinism. Lebed publicly threw his support behind Yeltsin, receiving an even higher award in his appointment as secretary of the Security Council and special advisor on national security affairs, at least for a while. Korzhakov, the once-trusted

Table 4.3 1996 Russian Presidential Election

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>First Round Vote</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Second Round Vote</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Boris Yeltsin	Independent	26,665,495	35.8	40,203,948	54.4
Gennady Zyuganov	Communist Party	24,211,686	32.5	30,102,288	40.7
Alexander Lebed	Congress of Russian Communities	10,974,736	14.7		
Grigory Yavlinsky	Yabloko	5,550,752	7.4		
Vladimir Zhirinovskiy	Liberal Democratic Party	4,311,479	5.8		
Mikhail Gorbachev	Independent	386,069	0.5		

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

head of Yeltsin's security team and a strong proponent of postponing the election, was sacked.<sup>14</sup>

But behind the scenes, things were going badly. While campaigning between the first and second rounds, Yeltsin began to experience chest pains. Three days later he was stricken by a full-scale heart attack, his fourth. His worsened condition was kept from the voters, however, and a few televised appearances from the hospital were staged to conceal their origin.

On Wednesday, July 3, Yeltsin won his second term in office. He received 54.4 percent of the vote, hardly a landslide, but good enough under the circumstances. Zyuganov got 40.7 percent. "None of the above" got 5 percent, up from 1.5 percent in the first round. By their own admission, Gorbachev and Zhirinovskiy also voted "none of the above," but to little avail.

## The Second Term: From Victory to Resignation

Yeltsin never recovered fully from the serious heart attack that struck him between the first and second rounds of balloting. Timothy Colton describes the beginning of Yeltsin's second term as a "reactive mode" in which he attempted, despite ill health, to clean up the loose ends of the campaign and find a firm footing from which to govern the nation.<sup>15</sup>

In September 1996, Yeltsin publicly admitted the seriousness of his condition and alerted the nation that he would be undergoing an unspecified operation in the near future. Heart bypass surgery occurred two months later, with the president attended to by an international team of surgeons. Although he survived, as was expected, he was never quite the same. His convalescence was long and hard, and during his recovery the day-to-day affairs of the country were in the hands of Chernomyrdin, whom he had once again appointed prime minister; Chubais, now presidential chief of staff, largely because of his successful conduct of the campaign; Gennady Seleznyov, speaker of the Duma; and Yegor Stroeve, speaker of the Federation Council. Chernomyrdin and Chubais clearly ran the show, with Yeltsin's daughter, Tatiana, never far away.

Everyone in the president's team was in agreement about the first task that lay before them: reining in Lebed, who was already overplaying his hand as the putative chief of national security policy. Lebed acted as if the next presidential campaign had begun, demanding additional powers and impudently suggesting that Yeltsin step down from office until he had

recovered fully. Yeltsin appointed Lebed as his personal envoy to Chechnya, instructing him to find an end to the hostilities. He cobbled together an uneasy peace, temporarily ending the war. Ominously for Yeltsin, public opinion polls revealed that Lebed was the second most popular political leader in the country, with Yeltsin a narrow first. With less than four months of service in his new post, Lebed was abruptly dismissed late in September amid thinly veiled charges of insubordination. Major changes in the high command of the military quickly followed. Down but not out, Lebed reinvented himself as a regional leader, eventually winning election as governor of the Krasnoyarsk province.<sup>16</sup>

Upon his return to active political life in the spring of 1997, Yeltsin launched a major shake-up designed to get control of the fractious presidential staff and advance the stalled campaign for economic reform. Yeltsin named Chubais to the post of first deputy prime minister under Chernomyrdin. Once again Chubais was instructed to take the lead in further economic reforms. Opposition quickly emerged to his preeminence, and soon another first deputy prime minister was named. The newcomer was Boris Nemtsov, the up-and-coming governor of Nizhny Novgorod, which he had made into a successful testing ground for business-friendly economic reforms.

Despite his return to active politics, Yeltsin remained frail and marginally involved in day-to-day governance. In many ways, it was a predictable return to his earlier style of leadership—bold, decisive actions followed by withdrawal and a failure to consolidate his victory—only made worse by his declining health. While he would occasionally rouse himself to action, putting presidential staff and government officials under fire and dismissing them with increasing frequency, little seemed to change in the real world. The revolving door, especially among prime ministers and ministers, spun more quickly. As the administration edged toward its unexpected demise, it became far more reactive than proactive.

In March 1998, Yeltsin fired Chernomyrdin from his post as prime minister and named Sergei Kiriyenko in his place. Kiriyenko was a product of the Nemtsov reform team in Nizhny Novgorod, and Yeltsin hoped that he would emerge as the second-generation Chubais who could jump-start economic reforms. The Duma, still under the control of Yeltsin's critics, vigorously opposed the appointment, approving it in the last-ditch, third round of voting to avoid giving Yeltsin the opportunity to dissolve the assembly and call a new general election. Kiriyenko's inauspicious beginning as prime minister would soon be followed by an even greater

shock, the crash of the Russian stock market and the devaluation of the ruble in 1998.

To his credit, Kiriyenko made all the right moves, at least at first. He secured the dismissal of key opponents to reform and said all the right things. But he could not forestall an economic crisis that began in Southeast and East Asia and quickly, like a tsunami, engulfed other nations. Efforts to get the Duma to authorize austerity measures failed. In truth, Yeltsin himself also bore a fair share of the blame, having promised budget-busting programs during the 1996 campaign.

The economic crisis gave the Duma the opportunity to launch a full-scale attack on the president. By a vote of 248 to 32, it passed a nonbinding resolution calling for his resignation. On August 22, Yeltsin dismissed the ill-fated Kiriyenko and, once again, nominated Chernomyrdin as a gesture toward the Duma and a symbol of cautious leadership. For once, the Duma made it clear it would reject Chernomyrdin, and that it intended to consider impeachment of the president. This presented Yeltsin with a dilemma. Under the 1993 constitution, the president could not dissolve the legislature once an article of impeachment had been voted by the Duma. This threatened to deprive the president of his most powerful weapon to force the acceptance of his nominee—to dissolve the Duma and call new elections.

Yeltsin backed down from the looming confrontation and withdrew Chernomyrdin's name. He now offered a compromise candidate, Yevgeny Primakov, the minister of foreign affairs. With roots in the last soviet and Gorbachev periods, he was minimally acceptable to everyone. At first he declined the nomination, but eventually he accepted under strong pressure to avoid a debilitating confrontation in the midst of an economic crisis. His nomination was approved on the first ballot, 317 to 63.

Primakov's nomination gave Yeltsin sorely needed breathing room in his confrontation with the Duma. Operating as a centrist with good relations with virtually all parties and factions within the legislature, Primakov ran a stable if unexciting coalition government. In truth, Yeltsin was increasingly withdrawing from public affairs, and the Primakov interregnum, coupled with good news as the economy rebounded in late 1998, led both the president and the Duma to let the sleeping dog lie undisturbed. Yeltsin's health again took a turn for the worse, leading to repeated absences from public view and increasing calls in the legislature and the media for him to step down with dignity.<sup>17</sup>

Yeltsin's declining physical and political fortunes led his staunchest enemies in the Duma once again to float the idea of impeachment. In May

1998, a legislative committee was created to draft charges against him, which under the constitution had to reflect “high treason or other serious crimes.” By February of the next year, five counts had been offered: destroying the USSR by signing the treaty for its dissolution, abetting murder in 1993 in his action against the Congress of People’s Deputies, exceeding presidential authority in sending armed forces into Chechnya, destroying the army, and causing the “genocide of the Russian people.”<sup>18</sup>

On the eve of the Duma vote on the charges, Yeltsin once again roused himself to action, although not as dramatically as before. Reacting to the complex situation in Yugoslavia, where Serbian forces were under NATO-sponsored pressure to cease their attacks on Kosovo, Yeltsin named Chernomyrdin as his special envoy to the region and symbolically committed a small contingent of Russian troops to the area. Little came of the action in Yugoslavia, but in Moscow it was now clear that the sleeping dog had been awakened once again. It was enough to buy Yeltsin more breathing room.

More seriously, Primakov’s growing popularity led Yeltsin to ponder his future. Touted as a serious candidate for the presidency in the next election, or before if Yeltsin’s health should fail, Primakov was not acceptable presidential material in Yeltsin’s eyes. Although competent and politically skilled, Primakov was too closely tied to the Gorbachev and soviet eras. Three days before the scheduled vote on the articles of impeachment, which would have made it impossible for the president to dissolve the Duma, Yeltsin fired Primakov and named Sergei Stepashin acting prime minister. Days later the startled Duma took the impeachment vote; not one of the five articles received the needed votes. Impeachment was a dead issue, and Stepashin was quickly confirmed as prime minister on the first ballot.

Stepashin, who had served as minister of the interior, was little more than a placeholder. But a placeholder for whom, or what? Yeltsin apparently considered a run for a third term, although the courts found that he was ineligible even though technically his first term began before the 1993 constitution was approved. Realizing that health and political reality militated against another last hurrah, Yeltsin undoubtedly pondered his legacy. In personal terms, he was concerned about forestalling any legal action against him as a private citizen. But more important was his concern that, although his years in office had brought democracy to Russia, he had failed to give it any lasting political order, especially a stable center that could withstand pressures from the more extreme elements of right and left. To be sure, much of the fault lay at Yeltsin’s own doorstep. Repeatedly he had

refused to create a presidential party or even to accept formal membership in the parties-of-power that had been cobbled together for each election. As the end drew near, Yeltsin became all the more willing to gamble on his successor, hoping to find a young, powerful figure with acceptable credentials as a democrat and an economic reformer on whom to stake the nation's future as well as the vindication of his years in office.

He eventually chose Vladimir Putin, although many others were on the initial list. Putin was a surprising choice, to say the least. Yeltsin offered few direct comments on the reason for his choice. But it seems apparent that, after marathon crises over the years, Yeltsin wanted someone who was capable of providing the highest of Russian virtues, *poryadok*—order, discipline, and rectitude. In Putin, the president thought he had found these qualities. Putin's democratic credentials were impeccable: He had served with Anatoly Sobchak, the first democratically elected leader of St. Petersburg. His credentials as an economic reformer were equally impressive: He had championed market-oriented reforms in that northern city and later in a number of posts in Moscow. His KGB background suggested that he had the discipline and backbone needed to bring order, consensually if possible; by other means, if necessary. Yeltsin appointed him chairman of the Federal Security Service, the successor to the KGB, in July 1998, and he did not disappoint. He was soon also named secretary of the Security Council. Putin's star was rising, and Yeltsin began to hint that he would be the aging president's anointed successor.

On August 9, 1999, Yeltsin dismissed Stepashin. Putin was designated as acting prime minister and subsequently confirmed in office by the Duma. For a number of reasons, Putin caught the public imagination, and his stock in the opinion polls rose quickly. He was a positive contrast to the infirm president and the colorless series of prime ministers who had preceded him in office. He did all the right things: increased pensions, campaigned vigorously for pro-Yeltsin candidates in the Duma elections in the fall of 1999; and stood tough when, allegedly, pro-Chechen terrorists set off a series of explosions in Moscow and other cities, sending Russian forces once again into their homeland in the Caucasus.<sup>19</sup>

## Yeltsin's Economic Reforms: Phase II (1994–1999)

Yeltsin's economic policy from 1994 to 1999 was in many ways a replay of his earlier policies. Throughout most of 1995, the government maintained

tighter control over the economy. As a consequence, government expenditures decreased (the good news), but wage arrears grew as both the government and private industries stopped paying workers on a regular basis and the safety net of social, medical, and educational services began to deteriorate (the bad news). Political reality soon created strong pressure to loosen economic controls; the next Duma elections were scheduled for 1995, and presidential elections followed the next year.

The second phase of the privatization program began in 1994, focused on the direct sale of shares in the remaining state-owned industries. Particularly controversial were the so-called “loans for shares” transactions. Badly in need of increased revenues, the government struck a deal with many of the nation’s top banks. The banks would lend the government the money it needed to pay wage arrears and run the state on a day-to-day basis; as collateral the banks were given extensive stock holdings in the larger state enterprises slated for privatization, including raw materials and energy giants. If the government failed to repay the loans (nobody really expected that to happen), the banks could then auction off these shares to the highest bidder. But in reality, the auctions were rigged; rather than bid the prices up to something approximating market value, the auctions sold off control of important industries to bank-favored insiders.

The primary beneficiary of these transactions was the first generation of oligarchs who built vast holdings as the economy shifted from state to private hands. Less pejoratively called “*nomenklatura* capitalists,” these were the enterprising former managers of soviet-era industries who bought up their former bailiwicks or skilled entrepreneurs who built vast and diversified holdings on their own. In the early days, an oligarch’s portfolio typically included at least one and more often a number of large industrial complexes, usually built around energy or raw materials industries, a bank or two, a newspaper and/or telecommunications facilities, and as time went on, increasing investment abroad. Not surprisingly, such wealth also quickly brought political influence. In his 1996 reelection bid, Yeltsin received extensive financial backing from a number of oligarchs, including Boris Berezovsky, who was particularly close to Yeltsin’s daughter.

On August 17, 1998, a major crisis rocked the economy. Long in coming and rooted in the government’s short-sighted policies, it brought the economy to near collapse for the next year. It began with an announcement that the government could not pay its debts. The government default quickly spilled over to the private sector. The Russian stock market lost 90 percent of its value in 1998 alone, and unemployment rose to nearly

18 percent of the total population, far exceeding even the worst years of the Great Depression in the United States. Ninety-nine percent of the value of private savings disappeared. Although there was plenty of blame to go around, the average Russian blamed the collapse on the self-serving oligarchs and on a government that was unwilling, or perhaps just too weak, to control them.<sup>20</sup>

## Foreign Policy

The ratification of a new constitution in December 1993 radically changed the institutional setting of foreign policy formation. The presidency was vested with increased powers, including the right to “define the basic domestic and foreign policy guidelines” within boundaries established by the constitution, a purposely ambiguous formulation that Yeltsin and future presidents would cite as granting them virtually *carte blanche*. The president has the power to “supervise the conduct of foreign policy” and “conduct negotiations and sign treaties.” The chief executive also serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and sets the military doctrine of the armed forces. In addition, the foreign minister and the other “power ministries”—defense, interior, and the heads of the intelligence and security agencies—report directly to the president and not the prime minister. Yeltsin strengthened the Security Council as an advisory body, although he refused to give it operational control, fearing that it could potentially challenge presidential power. Consistent with this concern, Yeltsin increasingly vested power in the hands of the Foreign Ministry and sustained an important role for the former KGB, which was divided operationally into as many as six separate agencies with different areas of responsibility. In contrast, the Ministry of Defense and the military establishment in general lost power under the new arrangement, in part because of the ineptitude of the high command and in part out of pique at the military’s lackluster performance in the first Chechen war. More fundamentally, Yeltsin was intent on reforming the officer-heavy, corrupt, and wasteful military, pledging to cut the size of the armed forces, end conscription, and reduce the military budget to 3.5 percent of the gross national product, down from a 1991 level of 7.2 percent.

The pro-Western “Atlanticist” orientation that had dominated Russian foreign policy continued to deteriorate after the 1993 crisis. In part out of disappointment with scant Western economic aid, and in part

out of resentment of what was perceived as Western paternalism, Yeltsin took a harder line. To be sure, the move also was motivated by domestic political concerns; the Dumas elected in 1993 and 1995 were dominated by critics on both the right and the left who advocated a more assertive foreign policy. Russia grew more supportive of Serbia's actions after the breakup of Yugoslavia and more critical of NATO, especially concerning possible membership for former Warsaw Treaty nations anxious to join in light of Moscow's assertion of a sphere of influence in the region. Although Russian diplomats openly accepted the argument that a new European security mechanism was needed, they favored its creation through the more neutral Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe rather than the cold war-tainted NATO. Eventually Russia settled in 1977 for the creation of a NATO-Russia Council, which provided a mechanism for ongoing consultation but left NATO free to act independently.

Relations with the former soviet republics also proved difficult. The Commonwealth of Independent States, created at the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union, was little more than a hollow shell. Yeltsin treated it as an instrument of Russian foreign policy, which offended other members. Efforts to merge Russia and Belarus produced little beyond meaningless platitudes about a "common economic space." Under pressure from Russian nationalists in the Duma who wanted to see these two Slavic peoples reunited, Yeltsin signed a treaty creating a formal union days before his resignation in 1999. In reality, the agreement clarified nothing about either the political or economic relations between the two nations. Relations with Ukraine were clouded by the status of the Crimea, formerly a part of Russia that Khrushchev had generously given to Ukraine, and the Russian Black Sea fleet, anchored in Sevastopol. In 1977, both sides reached an agreement that permitted Russia to lease port facilities for the fleet for twenty years.

In 1996, Yeltsin replaced Kozyrev, who remained as the lightning rod for opposition to his foreign policy, with Primakov, then director of the Foreign Intelligence Service. Primakov's credentials included long service in various foreign policy think tanks and close connections to the KGB. Trained as a specialist in the Middle East, he quickly emerged as a pragmatist who championed Moscow efforts to contain NATO expansion, reassert its influence over the former soviet republics and Eastern Europe, and restore its presence in the third world, especially the Arab world. As Yeltsin's health deteriorated after the 1996 presidential race, Primakov

increasingly took control over a more assertive and nationalist foreign policy, winning respect from the Duma.<sup>21</sup>

## The First Chechen War

Independence and national self-determination for the fifteen former republics of the Soviet Union was one thing, but the status of the administrative territories within the new Russian Federation was quite another. Like the former republics, they were deeply concerned with redefining their relationship with the “center,” and the vast majority of them wanted to see Moscow’s control over local affairs weakened. In fact, considerable devolution of power and authority had already occurred, and there was little that Yeltsin’s new government in Moscow could do about it. By March 1992, a new format was reached that provided different categories of membership in the Russian Federation: republics, territories, regions, and autonomous areas, plus two “federal cities,” Moscow and St. Petersburg. In reality, all but one of these new administrative units entered into bilateral negotiations with Moscow and eventually reached some agreement, at first usually involving considerable concessions to local autonomy. That one exception was Chechnya.

Gorbachev’s reforms and the reawakening of national identity soon produced national independence movements throughout the Caucasus. In September 1991, members of the Congress of the Chechen People, a nationalist group led by a former soviet air force general, Dzhokhar Dudayev, seized control of the pro-Moscow legislature in Grozny, effectively establishing an independent government. Dudayev was named president and declared independence from the Soviet Union. Preoccupied with the final stages of his struggle with Gorbachev, Yeltsin dispatched troops to Grozny, quickly withdrawing them when he realized that Chechen forces had surrounded the airport at which they landed. The direct conflict with Moscow remained muted for the next several years as Chechnya slipped ever deeper into internal chaos and an increasingly authoritarian Dudayev faced growing opposition at home from other nationalists and local warlords. In 1993, Chechnya once again proclaimed its independence, this time from the Russian Federation.

Anti-Dudayev forces were quick to reach out to Moscow for support, and Yeltsin was more than willing to provide assistance, hoping to make an example of the breakaway regime to discourage others from similar action. In October and November 1994, Russian and anti-Dudayev forces struck against Grozny. Both attempts to dislodge Dudayev failed, and late in

November, Yeltsin issued an ultimatum to all forces in Chechnya to lay down their arms and submit to Moscow's control. Dudayev refused, and heavy aerial bombardment began on December 1, followed ten days later by an invasion of Russian forces. The military had promised Yeltsin a quick and easy victory.

They couldn't keep their promise. Many within the Russian ground forces opposed the attack, as did some of Yeltsin's own advisors. Poorly trained and demoralized Russian troops quickly fell victim to the tactical skill of Chechen fighters who engaged them in urban guerrilla warfare and then took to the hills when Grozny eventually fell after prolonged bombing and artillery attacks. Now occupying the bombed-out shell of the city, Russian troops slowly and painfully extended their control over the countryside. In March 1996, rebel forces infiltrated Grozny and launched a surprise raid on the city; more a propaganda victory than a military success, it reminded war-weary Russians that the conflict was far from over.

Those same war-weary Russians were about to go to the polls in the 1996 presidential election in which Yeltsin was waging an uphill fight for a second term. His prospects seemingly brightened when a Russian missile attack killed Dudayev on April 21, 1996. Yeltsin quickly proclaimed "victory" and negotiated a brief cease-fire. Whatever the military merit of the proclamation, it defused the conflict and undoubtedly contributed to Yeltsin's second-round victory. But Dudayev's eventual successor, Aslan Maskhadov, was already planning a second offensive to retake Grozny.

The attack came on August 19, shortly after Yeltsin had taken the oath of office for the second time. Fighting in Grozny was heavy, and the rebels rebuffed several attempts to relieve the stunned Russian army. In desperation, the Russian commander threatened the use of heavy bombardment and told the civilian population to flee for their lives. The Russian offensive was ended by a cease-fire brokered by Alexander Lebed, who had come in third in the presidential balloting and thrown his support to Yeltsin. The agreement that emerged from further talks led to the withdrawal of all Russian forces from Chechnya and de facto independence. Several months later, Yeltsin and Maskhadov signed a formal peace agreement. It was over—for now.<sup>22</sup>

## The December 1999 Duma Elections

The December 1999 Duma elections were not so much the last event of the rapidly failing Yeltsin regime as the first event of the now-inevitable

Putin era. With Putin the designated heir apparent (although it was not yet evident how quickly Yeltsin intended to relinquish the presidency), all eyes turned to how the elections would play out for the future, not the current, leader. In many ways, the political landscape was familiar. The once-powerful “party of power,” Our Home Is Russia, had already withered on the vine, as had its predecessors, a victim of presidential inattention and the regrouping of political forces for the post-Yeltsin era. Among the others, the Communist Party still held the lead as the likely centerpiece of a postelection anti-Yeltsin and anti-Putin coalition. Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party was still there, but continuing to slip away both because its base was being tempted by other parties and because of the bizarre actions of its leader.

At first there was an attempt to rebuild a viable middle ground not controlled by Yeltsin and Putin, although the effort was compromised by the ambitions of other presidential hopefuls. In the regions, individual governors launched their own parties, variously to promote their own candidacy, consolidate control over their bailiwicks, or play a role in brokering the selection of the next president. Moscow’s ambitious mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, who had made no secret of his presidential aspirations, founded Fatherland Front in December 1998. Other regional leaders quickly followed. Samara’s governor formed a bloc called Russia’s Voice; Kemerovo’s governor offered Revival and Unity; and Tatarstan’s governor created United Russia. In August 1999, Fatherland Front and United Russia formed an alliance, Fatherland–All Russia, naming dismissed former prime minister Primakov as its head and establishing him as a likely candidate in the next presidential election, formally scheduled for June 2000. Another attempt to regroup the middle ground around a reformist and business-friendly coalition emerged in the Union of Right Forces, also created in 1999. Closely associated with reformers like Chubais, Nemtsov, and Gaidar, it offered itself as a pro-democratic and pro-market alternative to Putin.

Yeltsin’s endorsement of Putin as heir apparent scrambled his opponents’ plans. Under pressure to create an alternative centrist coalition more supportive of his bid for office, Putin invited a large group of regional governors to Moscow late in September. He forcefully informed them that he personally would back a new pro-Kremlin party now being formed by Sergei Shoigu, a Yeltsin loyalist. No strangers to the reality of political power, the governors quickly got the message and signed up for the new bloc, Unity, which fielded candidates for the upcoming Duma election and

endorsed Putin's presidential bid. Following the Yeltsin tradition, Putin would indicate his personal preference for Unity candidates running for the Duma and accept its support in the presidential election, but not formally join its ranks.

Voting for the new legislature took place on December 19. The Communist Party again captured the largest plurality, with 24.3 percent of the party-list votes, for sixty-seven seats; it got an additional forty-six seats from the single-member districts (Table 4.4). That gave them an overall voting bloc in the Duma of 113 seats, down 44 from the previous election. Although it was still the primary party of the left and of opposition to Yeltsin's version of Russian democracy, it was in sharp decline.

Unity came in second in the party-list totals, getting 23.3 percent of the vote, for sixty-four seats. It picked up an additional nine seats from the districts, for a total of seventy-three seats, forty fewer than the Communists. Fatherland–All Russia followed with 13.3 percent of the party-list ballots, giving them thirty-seven seats, with another thirty-one from the districts. With sixty-eight seats, they were third in total Duma voting strength. The Union of Right Forces fared less well, with 8.5 percent of the party-list ballots, for twenty-four seats, and another five seats from the districts. The Liberal Democratic Party, now billing itself the Zhirinovskiy Bloc, got just 6.0 percent, for seventeen seats, with none from the districts; overall it dropped thirty-four seats from the last election. Yabloko got 5.9 percent, for sixteen seats, and another four seats from district balloting. It had dropped twenty-five seats from the previous Duma. None of the other parties got past the 5 percent cutoff for party-list seats, although a few gained a small presence from the districts. As before, independent candidates did well, capturing 105 seats in district voting. "None of the above," still a token measure of resistance, got just over 3 percent.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, the results presented a mixed picture. Former opposition parties from left to right did less well, but as yet no overwhelmingly popular centrist "party of power" had captured a commanding lead. The collective heirs of the Yeltsin years had not yet agreed completely on how to pick up the pieces, even in light of his endorsement of Putin. Perhaps the next presidential election, now more than six months away, would sort things out, and in the interim the presidential hopefuls could continue their game.

That was not the way Yeltsin himself intended it.

**Table 4.4** 1999 Russian Legislative Elections

<i>Party</i>	<i>Proportional Representation</i>	<i>Single-Member-District Voting</i>	<i>Total Seats</i>
Communist Party	Votes: 16,196,024 Percentage: 24.3 Seats: 67	Votes: 8,893,547 Percentage: 13.7 Seats: 46	113
Unity	Votes: 15,549,182 Percentage: 23.3 Seats: 64	Votes: 1,408,801 Percentage: 2.2 Seats: 9	73
Fatherland–All Russia	Votes: 8,886,753 Percentage: 13.3 Seats: 37	Votes: 5,469,389 Percentage: 8.4 Seats: 31	68
Union of Right Forces	Votes: 5,677,247 Percentage: 8.5 Seats: 24	Votes: 2,016,294 Percentage: 3.1 Seats: 5	29
Zhirinovsky Bloc	Votes: 3,990,038 Percentage: 6.0 Seats: 17	Votes: 1,026,690 Percentage: 1.6 Seats: 0	17
Yabloko	Votes: 3,955,611 Percentage: 5.9 Seats: 16	Votes: 3,289,760 Percentage: 5.1 Seats: 4	20
Our Home Is Russia	Votes: 790,983 Percentage: 1.2 Seats: 0	Votes: 1,733,257 Percentage: 2.7 Seats: 7	7
Russian All-People's Union	Votes: 245,266 Percentage: 0.4 Seats: 0	Votes: 700,976 Percentage: 1.0 Seats: 2	2
Independents		Votes: 27,877,095 Percentage: 43 Seats: 105	105

SOURCE: D. Nohlen and P. Stover. (2010). *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

## Yeltsin's Surprise Resignation

Late in 1999, Yeltsin played his last hand. The 1993 constitution provided that in the case of the resignation of a president, the prime minister automatically became acting president, with a new election to follow within three months. On December 24, Yeltsin advised Putin of his intention to resign on New Year's Eve. He told his daughter on December 28, three days

before the resignation, and his wife on the day of the event. His televised address to the nation on the last day of the twentieth century expressed sorrow for not doing more, closing with “I did all that I could.” After a brief ceremonial toast, he took his leave of the Kremlin, which he had fought hard to reach and to retain. “Take care of Russia,” he instructed Putin as he left.<sup>24</sup>

Citizen Yeltsin was now *na pensii*—on pension, retired, leaving an office and a nation as works still in progress.

### **Yeltsin as an Authoritarian Modernizer: A Final Assessment**

Much of the preliminary assessment offered in Chapter 3 holds true for the remainder of Yeltsin’s tenure in office. In many ways, his best days were behind him. His challenge to Gorbachev, his return from political oblivion to the presidency of the Russian republic in June 1991, his resistance to the coup attempt in August 1991, his role in the breakup of the Soviet Union, his support of rapid privatization of the economy, his coup in September 1993, and his role in drafting a new constitution—these were the actions of an authoritarian modernizer intent on transforming the nation he governed. But by December 1993, most of these elements were already in place. Only the second phase of privatization remained, and the general outlines of how it would be accomplished (but perhaps not its economic and political consequences) were apparent. The only new policy initiative after the ratification of the 1993 constitution was the growing war in Chechnya. Although the political and human costs were high for both sides, the conflict should be viewed against the larger backdrop of the negotiated relationship between the central government in Moscow and assertive local authorities in the regions. Chechnya was a bloody and costly exception, but an exception nonetheless.

These accomplishments clearly established Yeltsin as an authoritarian modernizer. He had addressed a host of issues that set the nation on a new course:

- A democracy, institutionalized in ways that revealed both the strength and the disorder of democratic rule, and one that he would defend against the 1991 coup attempt; a leftover communist-era legislature that had a different view of how power should be distributed within that democracy; and his own advisors, who suggested that he postpone the 1996 presidential election
- A market economy, going through a difficult period of privatization and adjustment

- A new international role for Russia, stronger and more assertive than Gorbachev's new thinking had implied, but less powerful and demanding than the former Soviet Union
- Above all, a new nation with a renewed sense of its Russian identity, despite its formal designation as a multinational federation

But there also were shortcomings. In his own way, Gorbachev had understood that transforming political institutions was only a part of consolidating democratic rule. Even his futile attempt to transform the Communist Party into a popular mass-based party contained the recognition that a viable party system was an important part of stabilizing democratic rule. But Yeltsin either did not understand or simply rejected the need to create a lasting presidential party. The jury-rigged entities cobbled together for each election hardly filled the void, especially since Yeltsin personally kept his distance from them. Yeltsin's strategy to reach out to the nation beyond Moscow's Garden Ring was to personalize, not institutionalize. To be sure, he was very good at it, and in 1996 it won him a second term against great odds. But it did not contribute to the creation of a broader party system or civil society that helped to stabilize and institutionalize democracy.

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