

**FaR 2021****International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****DEPENDENCE OF POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS OF RURAL  
NEWSPAPERS ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES**

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**Abstract**

The article describes the influence of economic and social relations on the financial situation and political orientations of the rural district newspapers of Western Siberia in 1990–2000. In this period, in the Russian Federation, there was a radical reform of the economic system, including the agricultural sector. The reorganization of agriculture took place in the context of political confrontations. The article attempts to analyze the impact of economic conditions and political processes on editorial teams, which are both translators of information and popularizers of various economic concepts and political views. Rural district publications were funded from the local budgets and distributed by mail subscription. The reform of the system of government in 1990–1993 led both to the formal independence of publications from communist orientations and lack of financial support in the spontaneous market. In the 1990s, most villagers did not support radical agricultural reforms. This was a consequence of the activities of the editorial staff of rural newspapers. An analysis of the activities of editorial teams identified two regions that are indicative of the development of the rural district press: Omsk region and the Altai Territory. By the early 2000s, rural newspapers had lost their influence as a result of the activities of regional authorities, changes in the position of agricultural farmers and reorganization of media structures. The rural voters gave their political preferences to the United Russia party.

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*Keywords:* Rural district newspaper, political orientations, elections



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## **1. Introduction**

It is believed that the fall of the communist regime and abandonment of the Soviet system of government caused political pluralism and contributed to the emergence of independent journalism. However, the process of formation of the media, as one of the democratic institutions was interconnected with the socio-economic processes and political realities. The role of the rural district press in this process is ambiguous. Radical economic reforms were supported by the majority of Russia's population. However, the regional and social components of this support are not taken into account. In Western Siberia, there was a so-called "red belt" - the Altai Territory, Kemerovo, Novosibirsk, Omsk regions, which traditionally voted for the left partis. In the 1990s, most voters were against radical reforms and their political representatives. It would be wrong to ignore the role of rural district newspapers in shaping these sentiments.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The article analyzes the influence of socio-economic transformations in the Russian Federation in the 1990s - 2000s on the activities of rural district editorial staff: funding, subordination and ideological orientations.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject is political orientations of the editorial staff of rural district newspapers. The authors rely on the conclusions obtained during their previous studies:

- transformation of collective and state farms into other forms of management did not take into account views of the majority of the rural population and led to the creation of large private farms, which caused an alienation of the population from the means of production. Individual rural businessmen became a class of new owners;
- during the federal election campaigns, the population voted against the supporters of radical economic reforms; in the elections of deputies to the regional legislative bodies and the elections of the Governors, votes were traditionally given to businessmen (Skosyreva et al., 2020).

Against the background of these changes, there was a change in the status, financial situation, political mood of editorial staff and content of rural district newspapers, which became the subject of the present study. The results provide grounds for determining future orientations of rural district publications and their role in the socio-cultural space.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify the dependence of political orientations of rural district editorial staff on socio-economic and political transformations in the region, forecasting the development of the rural press as an institution that preserves and reflects the original relations in the village.

## 5. Research Methods

The study is based on the principle of historicism, which provides for the study of social, economic and political institutions from their inception to the current historical period; the method of analysis of the socio-economic, socio-political life of the country was used taking into account the chronological sequence and specific historical conditions. This approach helped to consider qualitative changes in economic, social, cultural, and political relations.

The article is based on the results of research conducted by the Department of Regional Development of Omsk State Agrarian University within the "Problems of integrated development of the West Siberian region: history, economy, politics" project. The materials of Omsk regional committee of the Communist Party and the committee on information work of the Administration of Omsk region were used. The authors also used the materials provided by the Altai School of Political Studies (ASPS) - Barnaul and the Fund 1633 of the State Archives of the Altai Territory created by the party and Soviet leader, journalist and local historian V. A. Petrenko.

The problem-chronological, historical-systemic, historical-typological research methods were used.

## 6. Findings

The first rural district newspapers appeared during the collectivization. Their wide distribution began after the decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) "On the rural district and grassroots media", adopted on January 18, 1931. The decree emphasized the importance of district newspapers and suggested that party authorities should ensure proper ideological and organizational guidance of editorial staff. The district printing houses were created, and the TASS editorial boards were reorganized. The number of rural district newspapers grew rapidly (Bogdanov & Vyazemsky, 1971).

Newspapers solved the tasks set by the Party. However, the editorial staff was not ready for perestroika and reforms of the political system. By 1989, when the USSR Law "On the Press and Other Mass Media" was adopted, according to the media department of the Academy of Social Sciences, up to 80% of editors of district newspapers were 50 or older. In Western Siberia, there were no professional journalists in rural editorial offices (Varetsky, 1989).

Out of 32 editors of rural district newspapers in Omsk region, 14 people had pedagogical education (one secondary special), of which 7 graduated from the Higher Party School (VPSH); 6 people had a university education; four workers had agricultural education, one of them graduated from VPSH; other had medical, legal, cultural education; three editors had only higher party education ((State) Historical Archive of Omsk region. F. 9618. L. 1. C. 41). During the perestroika, editorial members lacking professional education and experience in the analysis of political changes were unprepared to analyze the disappearance of the USSR, the fall of the communist regime and the abandonment of the planned socialist regime.

Consider the relations of rural district editorial offices with various branches of government in Omsk region in 1992–2000, namely, the question of who were the founders of newspapers:

- in 1993 – 1993, the founders of newspapers were editorial staffs and district councils of people's deputies;

- in 1994 - 1997 - district administrations and editorial staffs;
- in 1998 - 2000 - regional departments of the press and mass media, district administrations, editorial staffs (Novikova et al., 2007).

This position took place in the rural areas of Western Siberia. Thus, the editorial staffs of rural district newspapers did not gain any independence from the authorities. The situation was characteristic of other subjects of Russia after the collapse of the USSR and the communist regime.

Despite the remoteness of Omsk, the editorial staff of rural district newspapers participated in socio-political controversies, posting materials of political parties on their pages and reacting vividly to the economic course pursued by the Government of the Russian Federation. At the same time, party documents were dominated by the documents of agrarian organizations, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). The materials of other parties were not published, and mentions of the pro-government parties were of an informational nature ((State) Historical Archive of the Omsk Region. F. 9618. L. 1. C. 428). An attitude to the reforms was manifested in satirical articles, political caricatures and reprints, describing the development of the country during socialist construction. As an example, cite the names of a number of materials published in rural district newspapers of Omsk region: "Light in the Kremlin, village in darkness", "Village near the abyss", "How to live in Isilkul", "How Lenya Golubkov met Yeltsin", "Most immoral occupation is to rely on the government", "Tanks above the Constitution", "Fakir was drunk" ((State) Historical archive of the Omsk region. F. 9618. L. 1. C. 35).

The proximity of rural district publications of the Altai Territory to the left views was discussed at the scientific-practical conference "Development of civil society in Russia: problems and prospects", held by the Altai School of Political Studies (ASPI). This situation took place during the years of operation of the institute of appointing Governors by the President. The representatives of democratic circles such as the chief specialist of the office of the Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Altai Territory A. F. Lyapunov, editor of the policy department of the newspaper "Free Course" D. B. Negreev and the head of the Altai branch of the Russian Socio-Political Center Foundation G. P. Shade acknowledged that the position of the rural district editorial offices in relation to the period 1992-1996 was ambiguous (Chernyshov, 1998).

The editorial staff did not hide their attitude to the government reforms. Their position reflected the mood of peasants, whose lives had deteriorated:

- in the conditions of commodity intervention of the 1990s, opportunities for the sale of agricultural products decreased, which reduced the income of peasants to 50% of the income of the urban residents;
- funds allocated for social needs from the budgets of collective and state farms disappeared along with these forms of management, and subsidies from the federal budget decreased, which led to a decline in the standard of living of peasants ";
- seasonality of labor hid unemployment, reaching 70%.

Analyze the results of transformations that began in the agricultural sector in 1990 and completed by 1994. 66% of farms changed their organizational and legal status: 0.3 thousand farms, 11.5 thousand partnerships, 1.9 thousand cooperatives, 0.4 thousand subsidiary farms, enterprises and organizations, 0.9

thousand farmers' associations, 81.6 thousand peasant / farm farms were created. By the forms of ownership, enterprises were distributed as follows: public - 26.6%, municipal - 1.5, private - 66.8, mixed - 5.1% (Kalugina, 2001).

Thus, as a result of reforms, in the village, there appeared owners. However, they were not satisfied with commodity intervention, the government refusal of subsidized support to the agricultural sector and the unresolved land issue.

With the formation of local government structures, various attitudes of their representatives to the media began to be published. Thus, who worked as a consultant to the Socio-Political Center (OPC) of Omsk region during the All-Russian Meeting of Employees of the First News Agencies, held in 1992 in Moscow, representatives of the Omsk delegation expressed concern over the following issues:

- A. B. Minzhurenko (President's representative for Omsk region) – over the need to create an ideological team capable of implementing reforms;

- A. B. Fedorov (press secretary of the head of the administration of Omsk region) – over the image of the head of the administration and the region;

- A. K. Guts (head of the information-analytical committee of Omsk region administration) – over the need to create structures capable of interacting with political and public organizations, conducting analytical reviews of the press, content analysis, as well as preparing press releases for the public -political forces and editorial offices of newspapers ((State) Historical Archive of the Omsk region. F. 443. L. 1. C. 11). The information and analytical committee was created in 1992. Since the beginning of 1994 under the leadership of G. N. Tatarinova the editorial offices of rural district newspapers received "Information Bulletins" twice a month; once a month they received materials on the activities of the administration, prepared taking into account the interests of rural readers ((State) Historical Archives of Omsk region. C. 40).

However, taking into account parallel elections of deputies of the State Duma and elections of the head of administration of Omsk region on December 12, 1995. the head L. K. Polezhaev temporarily distanced himself from pro-Kremlin politicians. As a result, the information-analytical committee popularized the governor-businessman in contrast to the reformist parties (Elections: political parties, press, voter (1988–1995), 1996; Lotkin et al., 1996).

In the Altai Territory, the situation developed differently. In 1994 A. A. Surikov was re-elected chairman of the regional Council of People's Deputies. In 1996, as an informal leader of the left, he became the governor of the region. The Regional Council was headed by the former People's Deputy from the Agrarian Party of Russia (APR) A. G. Nazarchuk. In the Altai Territory, the red-green coalition won. At the same time, according to V. S. Petrenko, on the eve of the gubernatorial election, the headquarters of A. A. Surikov did not have a complete list of media, and the support provided was a consequence of the mood of journalists (State Archives of the Altai Territory. F. 1633. L. 1. C. 535). The role of support provided by rural district editorial offices is explained by the fact that in the whole period only "Altai" media worked for the whole region, and in 20 out of 59 rural districts its programs were not broadcast (State Archives of Altai Krai. F. 1633. L. 1. C. 310).

Elections of the President of the Russian Federation in 1996 ended with the defeat of the incumbent president; in Omsk region G. A. Zyuganov won with 47.51%, beating the incumbent President by 1.28% of the vote at the expense of the rural population (Election of the President of the Russian Federation, 1996).

After the Presidential election campaign of 1996, the authorities intensified their work with the rural district press. In Omsk region, these measures were taken by the Information Committee of the Regional Administration. They were preceded by the closing of district newspapers and distributing the regional edition "Peasant Word" in the village. The analysis of distribution of the Communist Party newspaper "Red Way" in villages forced to abandon this decision (Novikova et al., 2007). In February 1997, the Gazetchik Foundation was established. It held meetings in the editorial offices, established editorial contacts with advertisers, supported the participation of journalists in All-Russian professional competitions, organized meetings with the Governor K. Polezhaev (Power and the district press..., 1998).

Budget support for publications increased:

- in 1997 by 8 million 861 thousand rubles (non-denominated);
- in 1998 by 7 million 689 thousand rubles (non-denominated);
- in 2000 by 5 million 178 thousand rubles (denominated) (Novikova et al., 2007).

By 2000, the authorities of Omsk region worked closely with the editorial staff of rural district newspapers, holding competitions: for the best materials about measures to curb drug trafficking in Omsk region, promoting the honorary title of "Honored Workers of Culture of the Russian Federation." The Press Bulletin published for the district press contained a polemic on the principles of journalism, a review of journalists' works of art, and a harmless analysis of the errors of certain newspapers.

In the analysis of the results of the Presidential election campaign, it would not be correct to consider them only as an influence of the authorities on the rural editorial staff. Over the years of reforms, the rural voter changed:

- became older - began to live in retirement and from a personal household;
- became a "shift worker" in the north or a construction worker in Moscow;
- became an owner who was expecting preferences from the new government.

What was the fate of the red-green coalition in these conditions?

In 2001 within the ASPI, a study of political orientations of Biysk, a typical provincial town with the status of a district center, were conducted. According to the study, in the period between the elections, activities of the Communist Party were not less agitational and mobilizing, and activities of other political organizations were almost invisible. During the survey of Biysk residents conducted by the Altai-Mnienic center in May 2001, the question was asked "Which parties' activities were most noticeable in Biysk and Biysk district?" Almost 43% mentioned the Communist Party, 4% - Yabloko Party, 3% - the Unity and APR Parties (Chernyshov, 2001; Diary of the Altai School of Political Studies, 13/14, 2001).

The results of these studies became one of the components of the decision to nominate the Soviet and Russian humorist and singer M. S. Evdokimov a candidate for the post of the Governor of the Altai Territory Soviet. People loved Evdokimov as a person. During the elections, he was not identified as a leader or as an economist. They saw him a hero who could change their lives (Bednarzhevsky, 2021). It was difficult to resist this image, especially in the countryside.

As a result, in the second round of voting, on April 4, 2004. M. S. Evdokimov won, 49.84% of voters voted for his candidacy, while A. A. Surikov received 45.98% of votes (Skosyreva et al., 2020).

## 7. Conclusion

We can conclude that

- rural district editorial offices have never been independent. Their co-founders were district authorities, and structural subdivisions of the regional authorities;
- assessments of political transformations and economic reforms broadcast by rural district newspapers reflected views of the population, district administrations, closely associated with businessmen turning from party members into business owners;
- the influence of the regional authorities on the rural district editorial offices was exerted through various structures, using “PR technologies”;
- under the influence of rural district newspapers, with limited distribution of other mass media in the districts, the voters often voted for the left forces; as a result of the elections of local councils and heads of district administrations, local governments consisted of businessmen who were politically supported by the regional government. The circle of party preferences closed in the early 2000s, when the rural voter voted for new owners, under the influence of rural district newspapers that reflected the views of these owners. Thus, during the economic reforms and formation of the electoral democracy system, rural newspapers underwent an evolution determined by social interests and political orientations of various groups of the population.

Modern editorial staffs are budgetary institutions; they are founders of rural newspapers together with the ministries of regional policy of the Russian regions and municipal administrations; members of the editorial boards follow the Russian legislation. Rural district newspapers publish materials presented by the authorities and tell the rural reader about history of the region, its picturesque places, villages, businesses and people. The development of the rural press as an institution that preserves and reflects the relations in the modern village is described in one of the assessments of the district reader:

“In this newspaper

About you and me:

About the milkmaid Aunt Clave,

About the mechanics Stepan,

About the Ilyins – Heroes of Gold anniversary”.

This situation will be stable in the long run. Factors that will cause its change and their prediction require further studies.

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