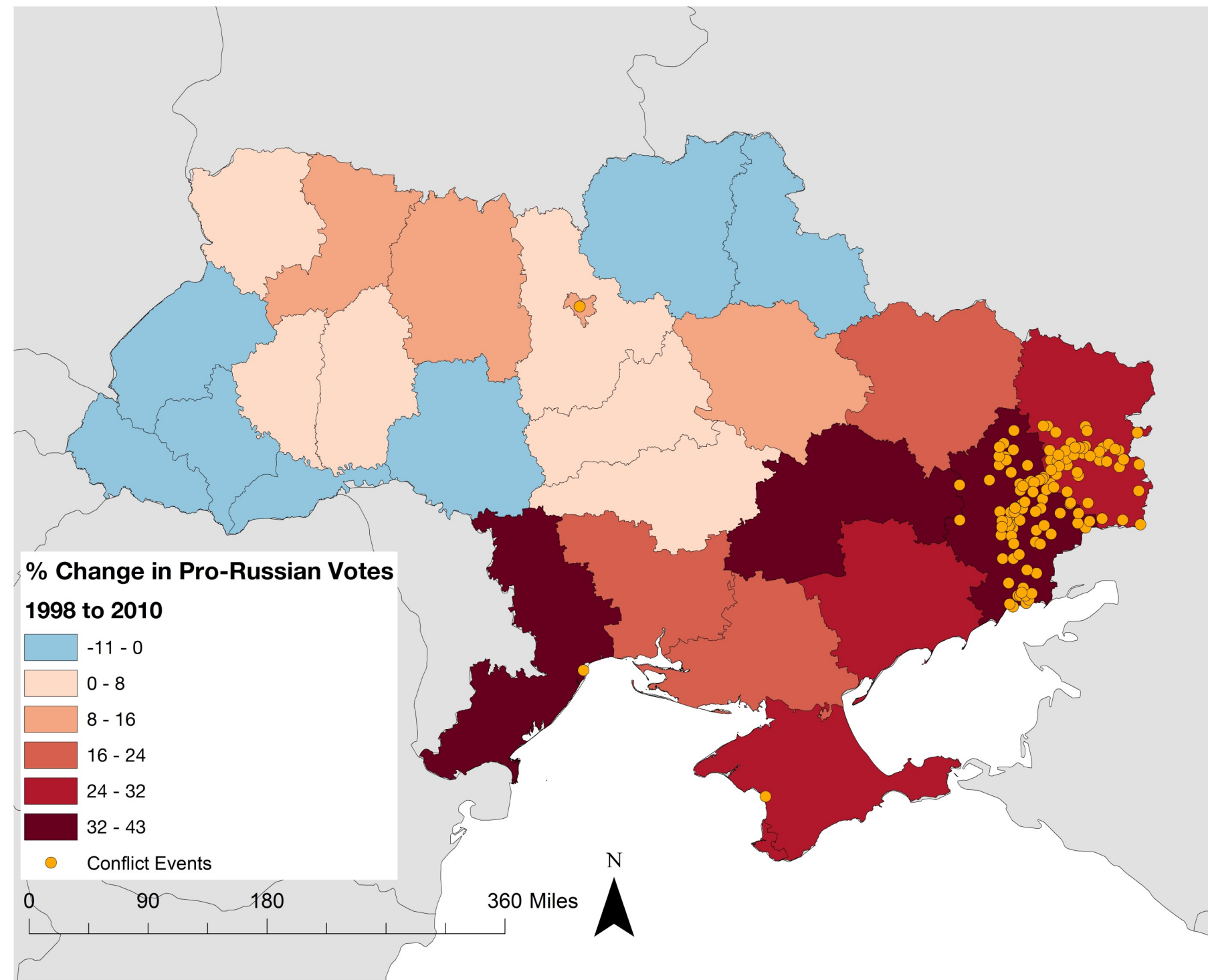
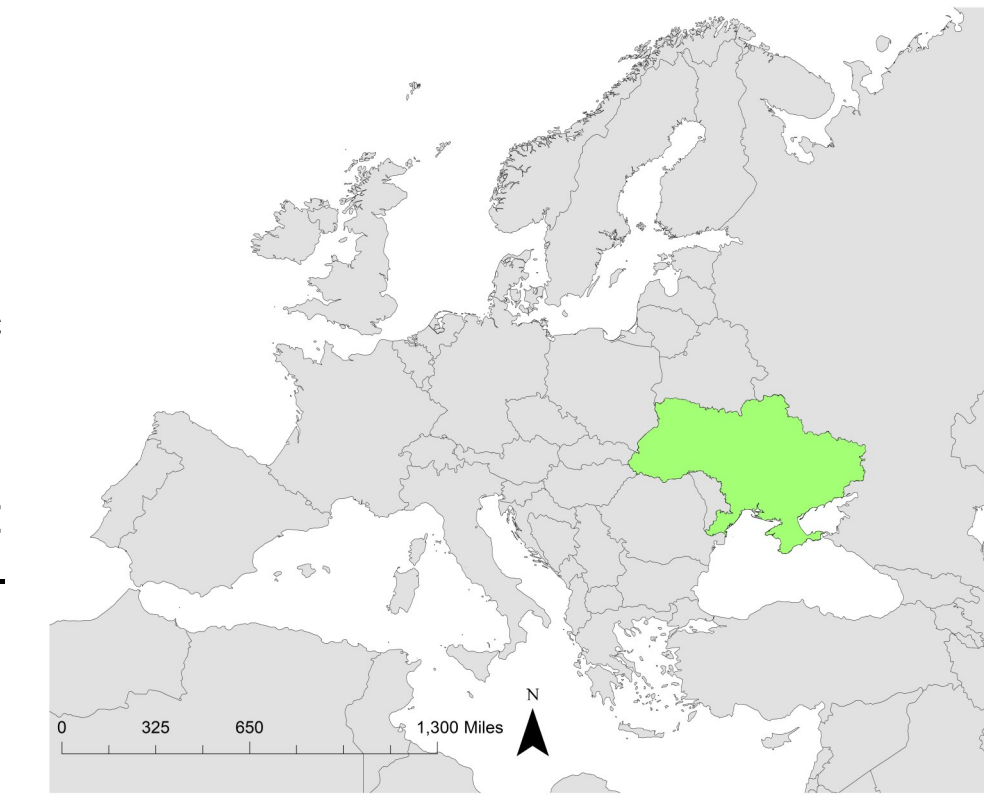


The War in the Donbass: Impacting Pro-Russian Sentiment

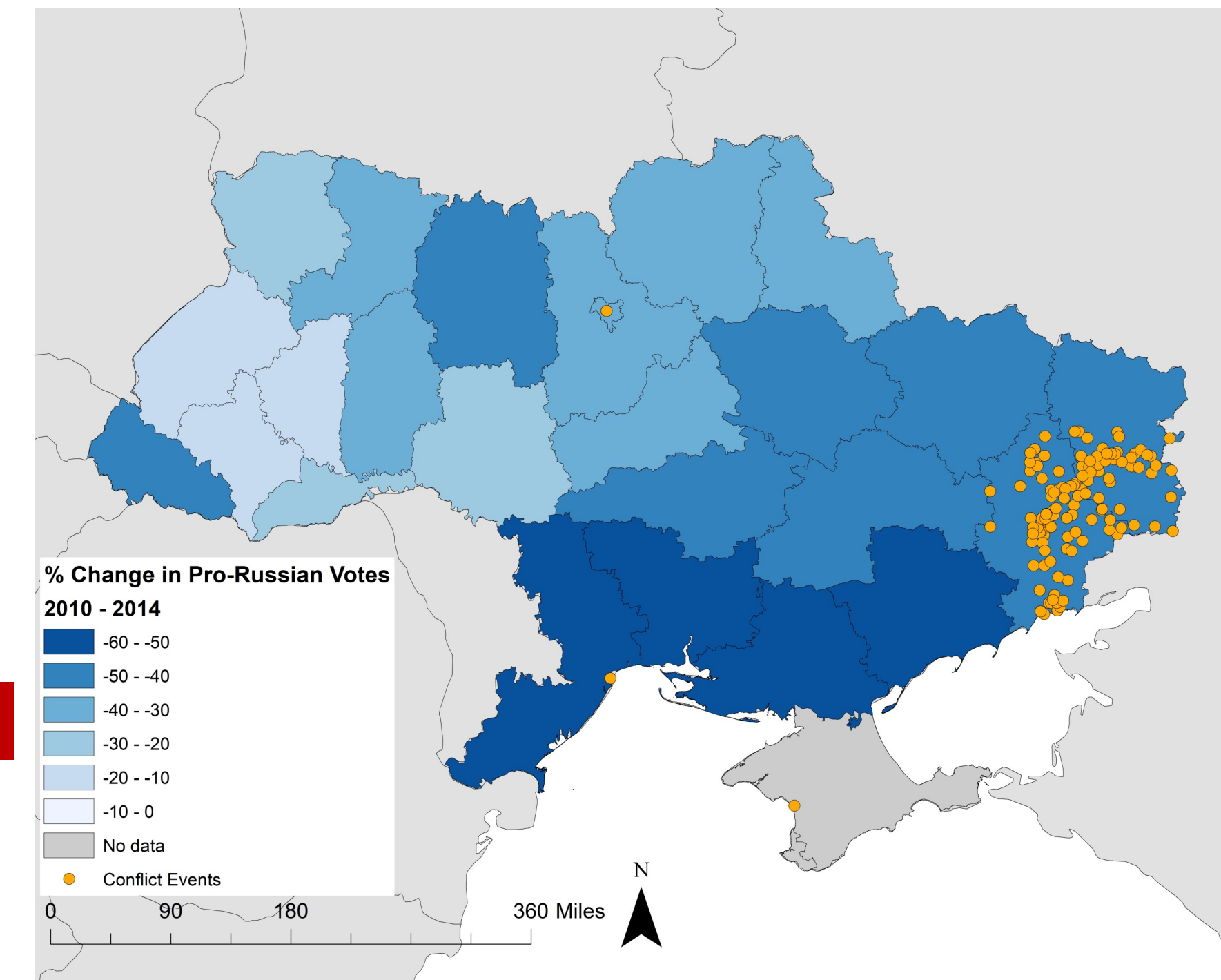
Background

Since leaving the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the early 1990s, Ukraine has been torn between two paths: welcoming closer relations with Russia and welcoming closer relations with the West. Generally speaking, those who prefer closer relations with Russia reside in the eastern parts of Ukraine -- mainly Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv, which all have a higher percentage of ethnic Russians. In 2014, there were massive protests in Kiev over the cancellation of a trade agreement with the European Union that would hurt Ukraine's relationship with Russia by the then president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. The protests culminated in a revolution and Yanukovich was overthrown. Pro-Western Petro Poroshenko was elected as president later in 2014. Shortly after the revolution, Russia annexed Crimea, an administrative region in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol. In the same month, Russian-backed separatist protests began in Donetsk and Luhansk (collectively called the Donbass). An armed conflict broke out between the protesters and the Ukrainian government, and Russia sent military forces to aid the protesters. The conflict, referred to as the "War in the Donbass," is ongoing, and Russia and Ukraine both refuse to give up their claim to Crimea. The aim of this project is to assess where and how Ukrainians' attitudes towards Russia have changed over the last 21 years. Specifically, it will be looking at the correlation between the areas close to the conflict region and their attitudes towards Russia before, during, and after 2014.



Percent changes in Pro-Russian votes from 1998 to 2010

Percent changes in Pro-Russian votes from 2010 to 2014



Cartographer: Olivia Hayward
Course: Introduction to GIS
Date: December 18, 2019
GCS: Pulkovo_1942_CS63_zone_X4
PCS: Transverse Mercator
Sources: Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Central Election Commission, Humanitarian Data Exchange

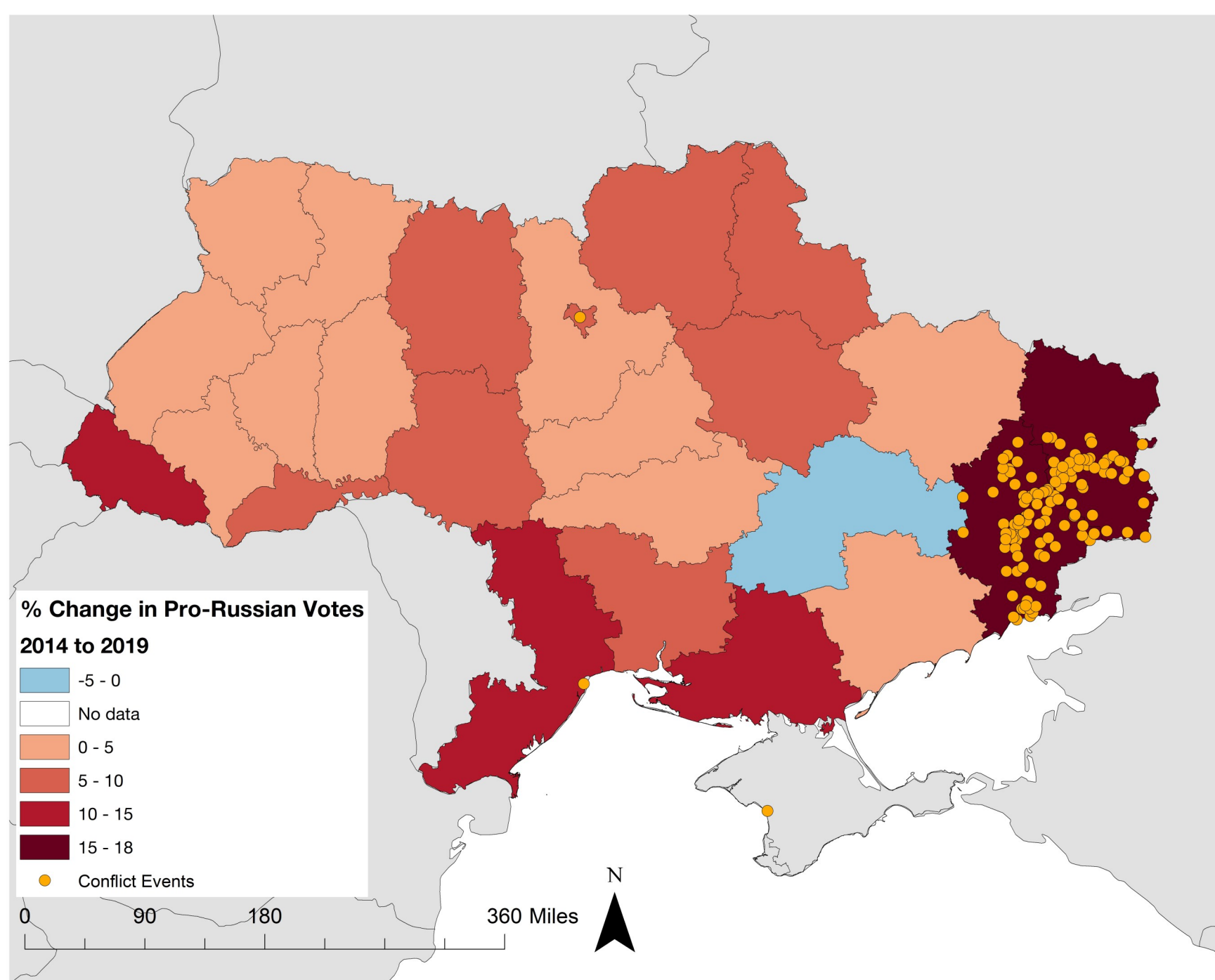
Methodology

To assess the views of Ukrainians towards Russia, I used election data by administration region (oblast) from the Ukrainian Central Election Commission. The basis for deciding the favorability towards Russia was the declared platforms of the political parties and of the presidential candidates' political parties. If the candidate was running as a representative of their own new political party, their opinions towards Ukraine joining the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as towards the Euromaidan revolution, were used to assess their leanings. After gathering and cleaning Ukrainian election data from 1998 to 2019, the election data by oblast was joined with a shapefile of Ukraine for each year of elections. The conflict point data was downloaded and then the x, y coordinates were geocoded to accurately represent the points on the map. Then, spatial join was used to join the number of conflict events in an oblast to the shapefile. The percent change in support for pro-Russian parties was tracked from 1998 to 2010, the earliest data I have to the peak of support; 2010 to 2014, from the year with the highest overall support for pro-Russian candidates to the year Russia annexed Crimea and Sevastopol and the war in the Donbass began; and 2014 to 2019, 2014 to the most recent election.

Results

Before 2014, the eastern oblasts of Ukraine had favorable views towards Russia and supported closer ties to Russia, specifically Donetsk and Luhansk. In the peak of support for pro-Russian political parties and candidates in Ukraine, the pro-Russian candidates won over 50% of the votes in 11 out of 27 oblasts, indicating strong pull from just under half of the country to form a stronger relationship with Russia than the West. During the 2014 election, 9 of these 11 oblasts lost over 40% support for pro-Russian candidates (the other two oblasts were Crimea and Sevastopol, which were both annexed by Russia and therefore were not able to participate in the Ukrainian elections). The Odessa oblast, which suffered an attack as a part of the conflict dropped support for pro-Russian candidates by 59% from 2010 to 2014. Interestingly, support in Kiev City dropped the least out of all of the oblasts with conflict events. Only 36% of previously Pro-Russian votes in Kiev City were lost to pro-Western candidates and parties, despite having six conflict events, which is five more than the Odessa oblast. There were two other oblasts whose support for pro-Russian agendas fell by over 40%, Transcarpathia and Zhytomyr, but these oblasts are in the western regions of Ukraine, far from the conflict.

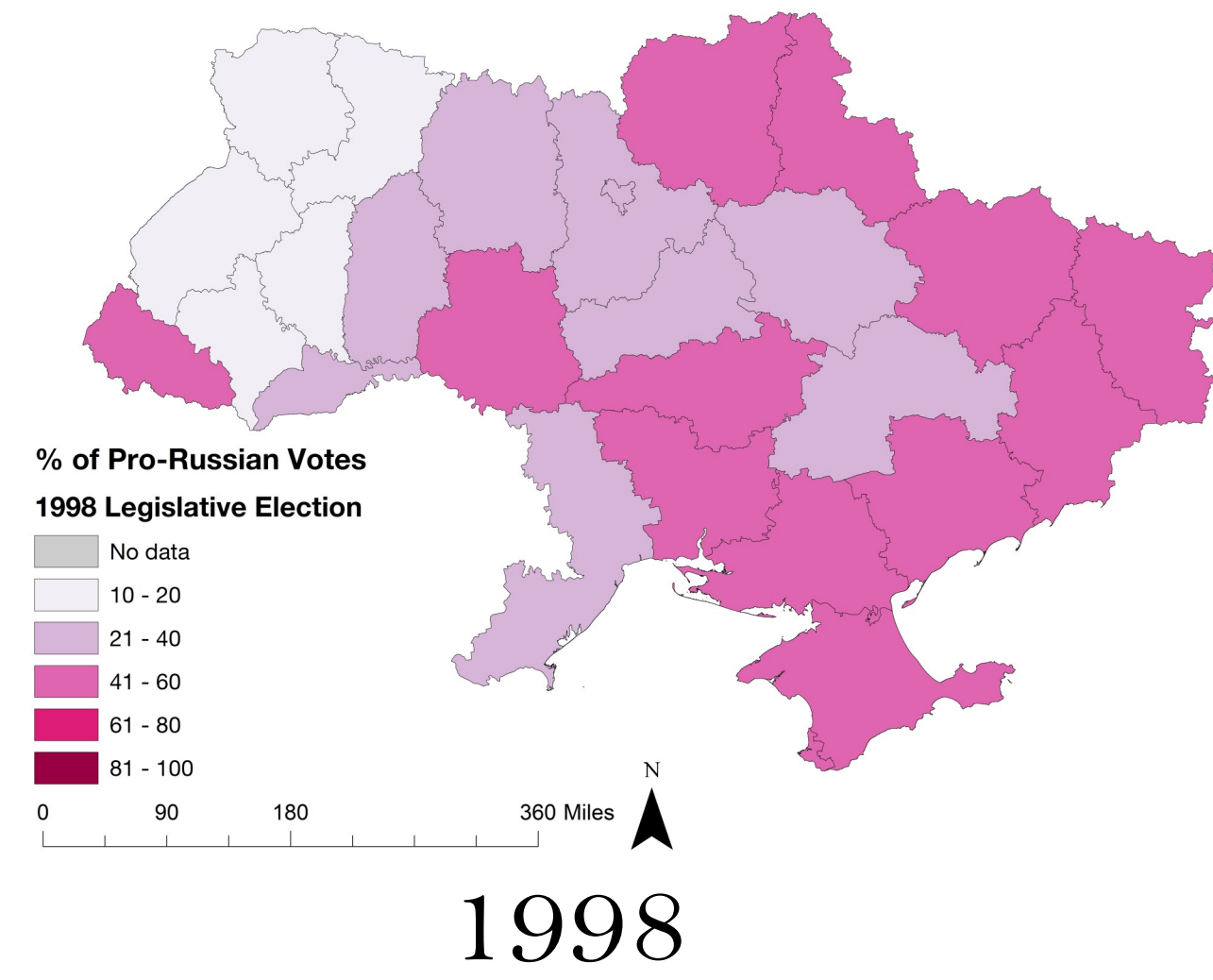
The two oblasts where the majority of the conflict is taking place, Donetsk and Luhansk, both had a -49% change in their pro-Russian votes in 2014, but both have seen an increase in pro-Russian votes in 2019. Donetsk has had an increase of 15% in votes for pro-Russian candidates since 2019 and Luhansk has had an increase of 18%. Overall, there was a significant decrease in pro-Russian votes in the 2014 election compared to the 2010 election. However, while the percentage of pro-Russian sentiments has not yet reached its peak again, it is increasing.



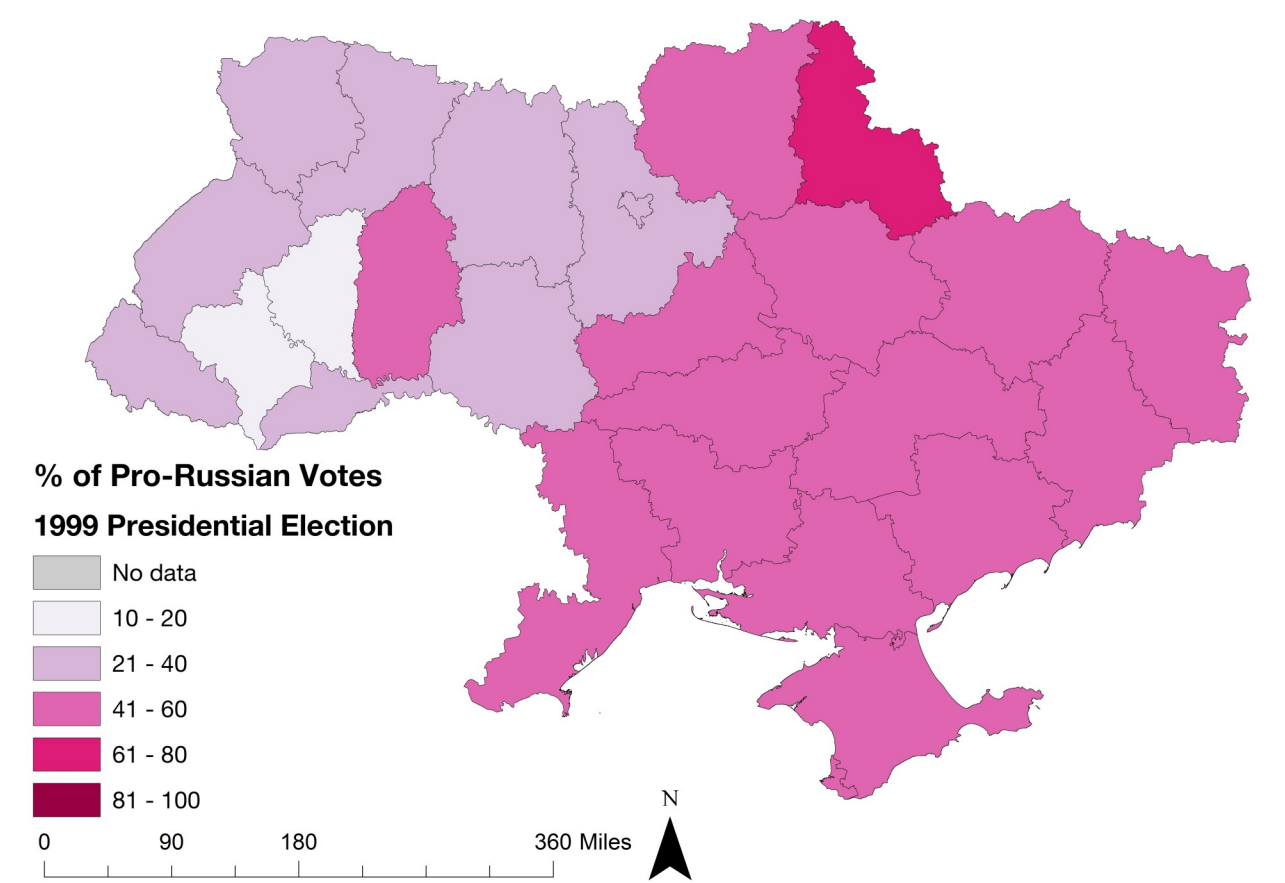
Percent changes in Pro-Russian votes from 2014 to 2019

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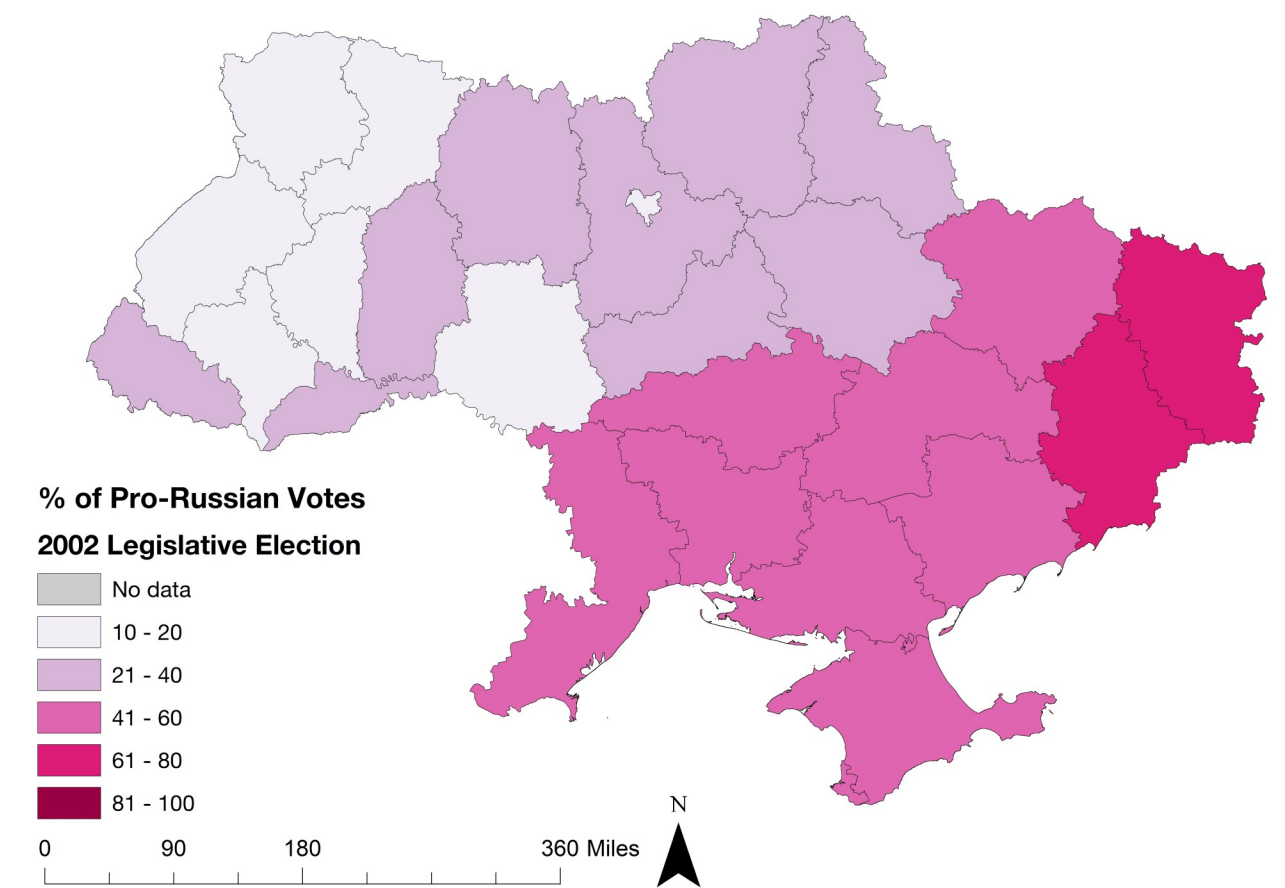
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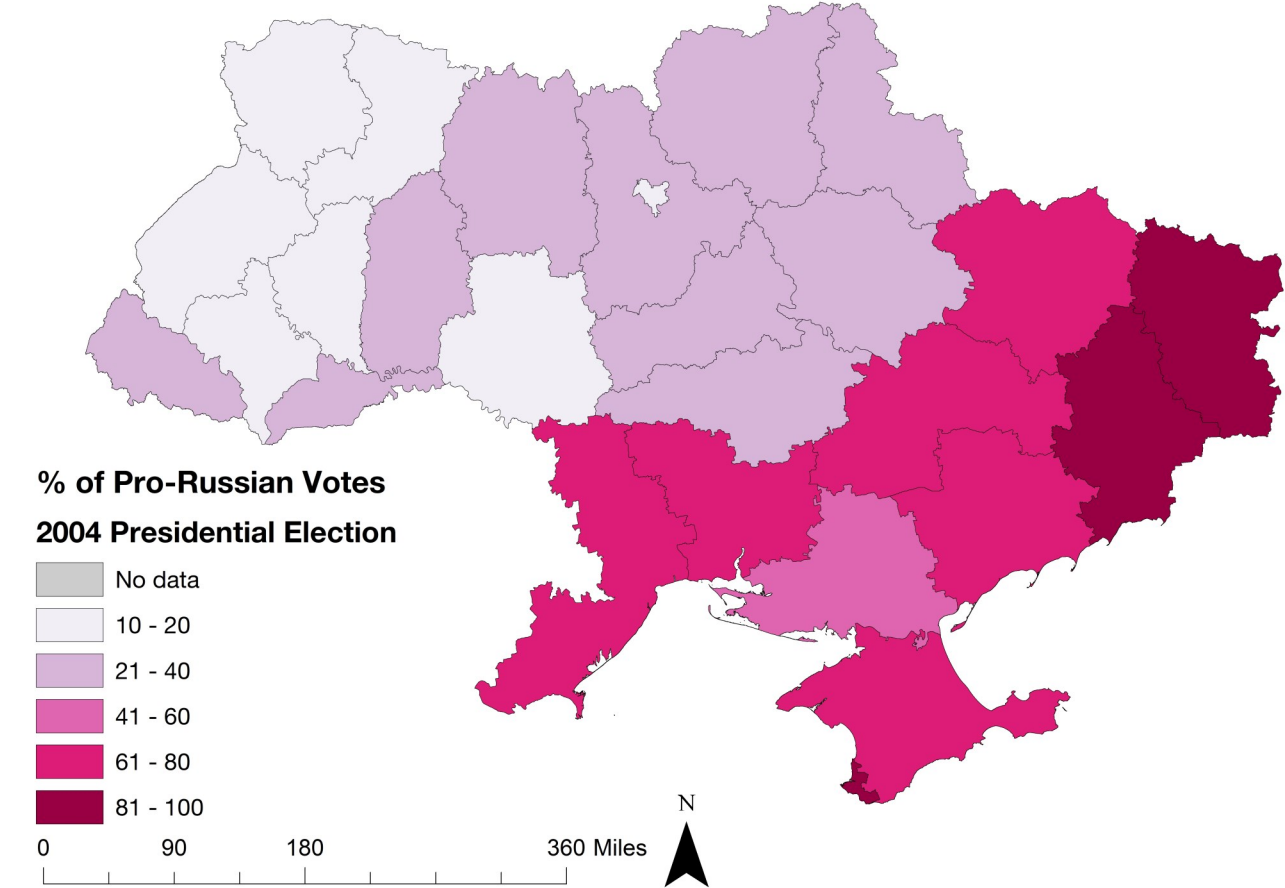
1998



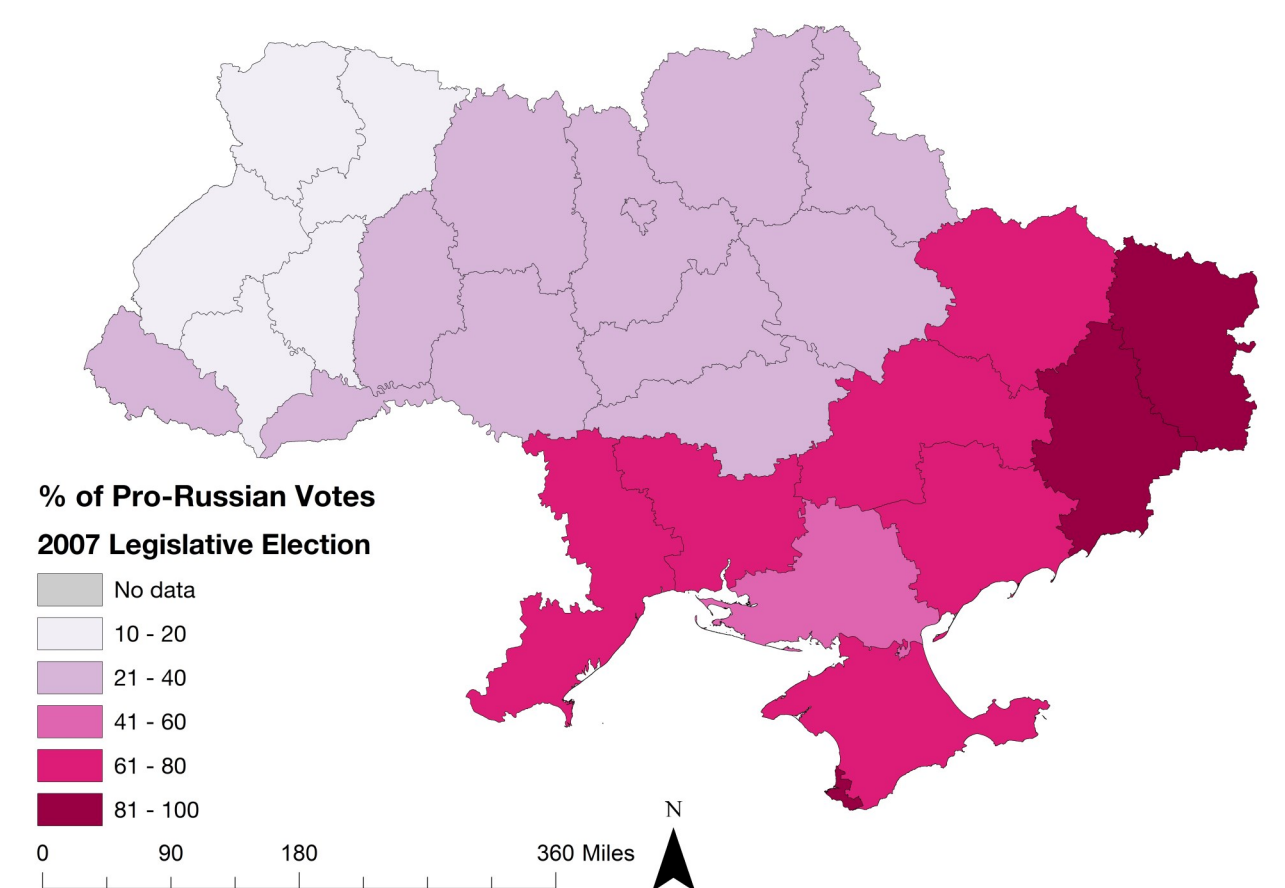
1999



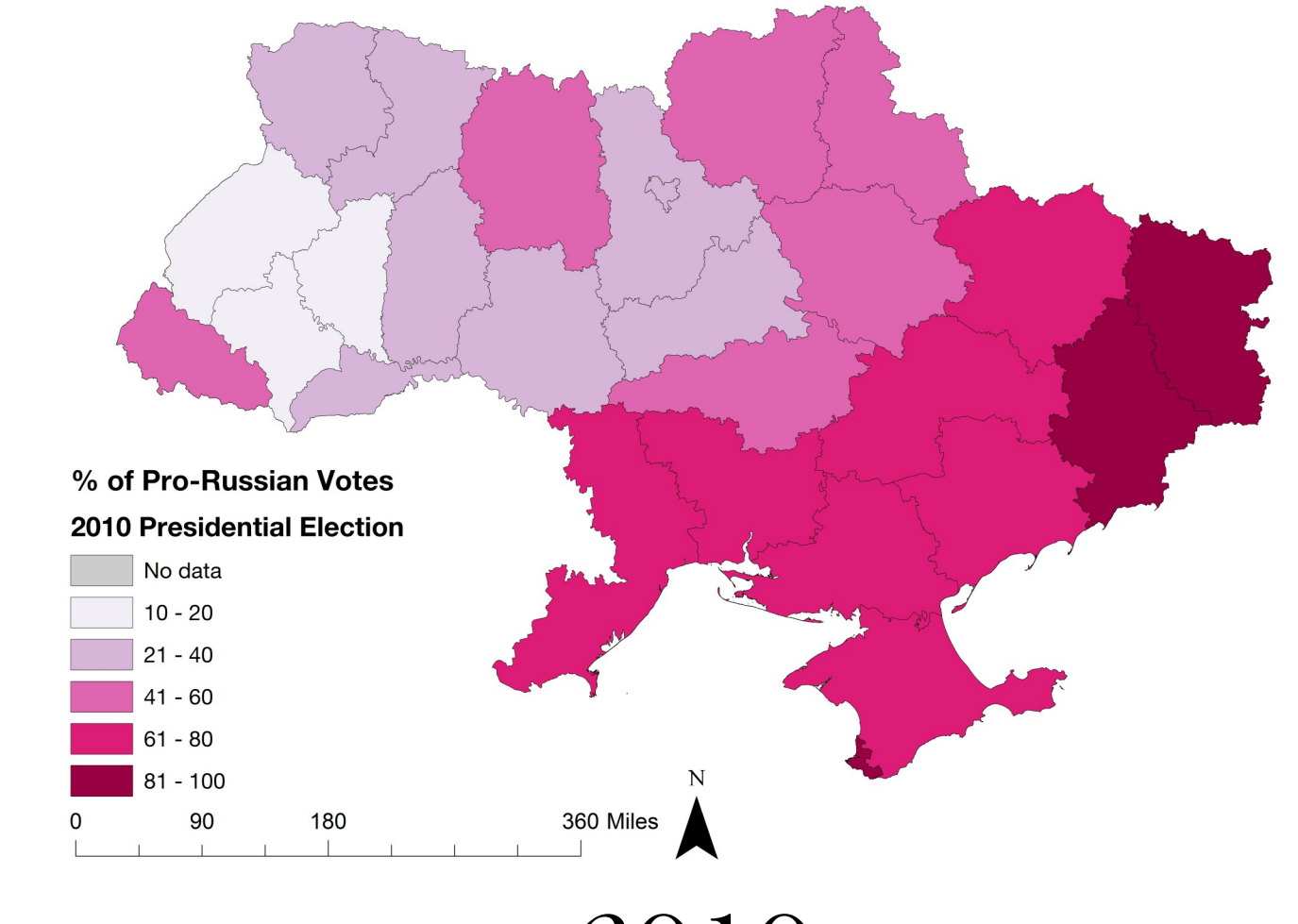
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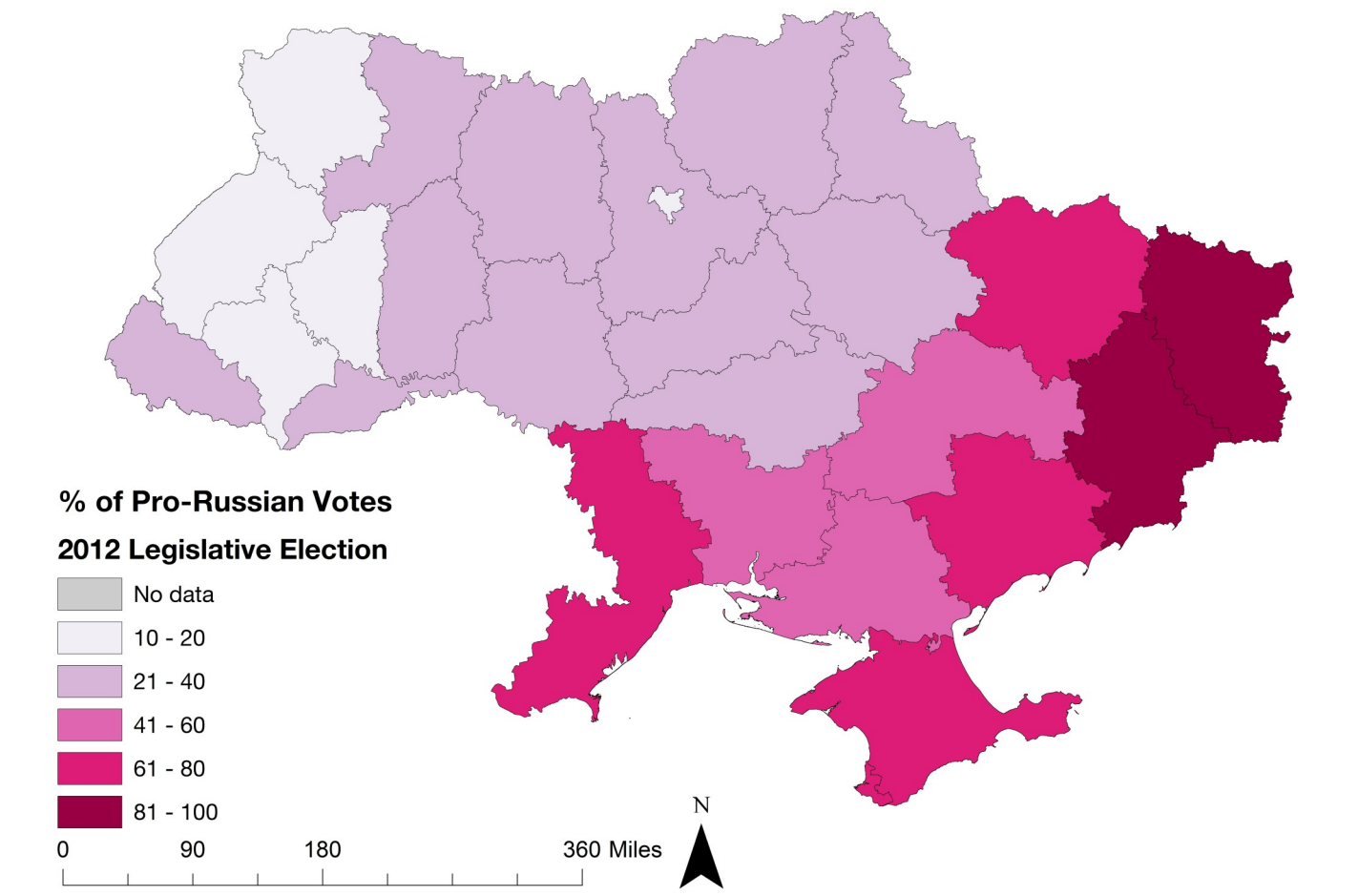
2004



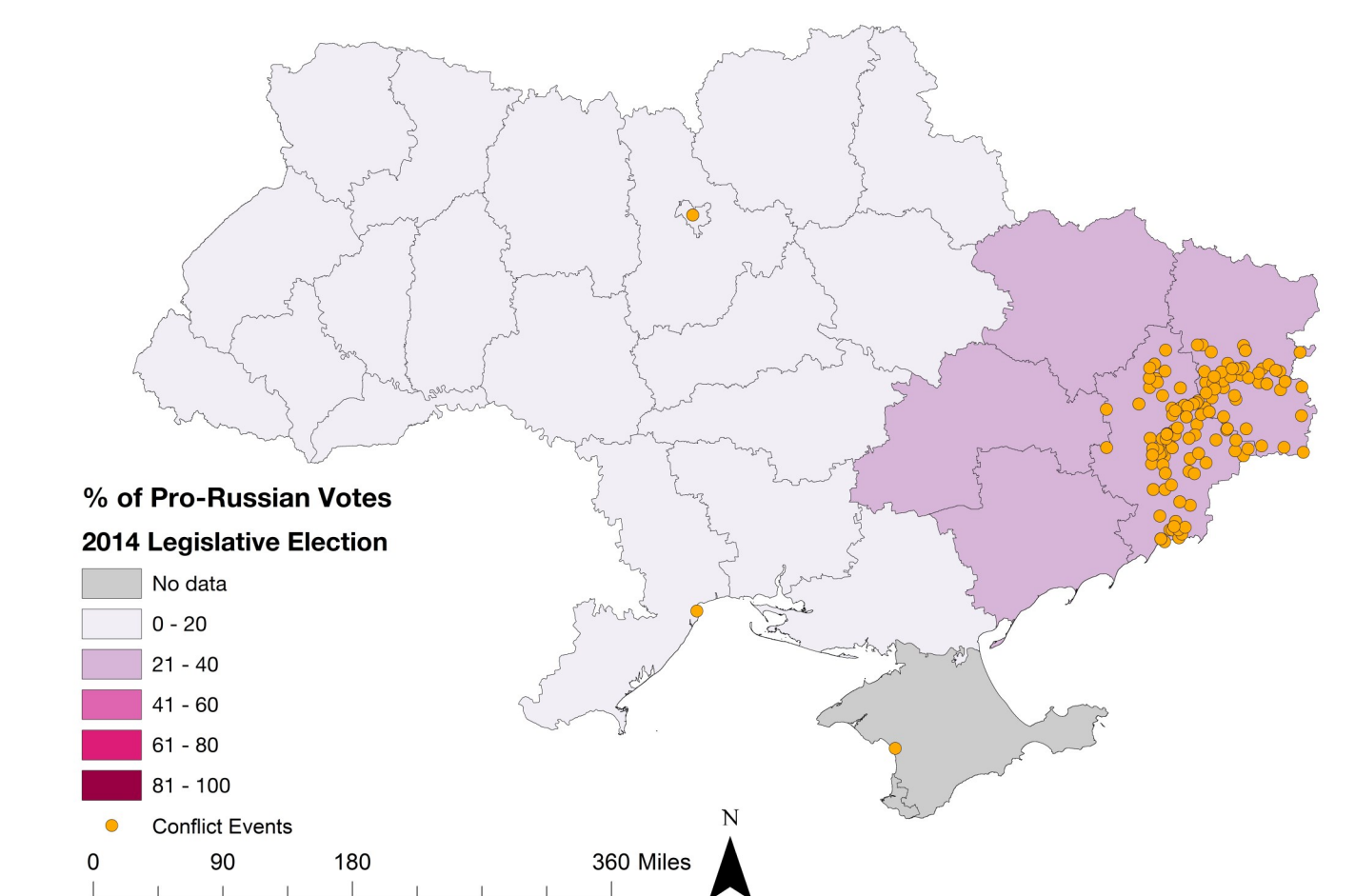
2007



2010



2012



2014



2019