

United Russia Lays Out Vote Strategy

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The ruling United Russia party plans to collect at least 50 percent of the vote at each of the 7,850 regional and municipal polls, many of which will be single candidate elections, party bosses said Monday.

The party expects to win majorities in the six regional legislatures — in the Tuva republic and the regions of Belgorod, Kostroma, Magadan, Novosibirsk and Chelyabinsk — that will be up for grabs this Sunday, as well as about 40,000 seats in municipal bodies, said Valery Galchenko of the party's central executive committee.

Galchenko blamed the opposition for single candidate elections, saying opposition candidates failed to apply for registration because they are only interested in the 2011 State Duma elections.

"They don't want to take responsibility for what happens in the regions but itch to get a place in the federal body," he said at a United Russia news conference in Moscow.

Of the six elections for regional legislatures, only one, in Chelyabinsk, will see participation from all seven of the country's registered political parties, said Sergei Neverov of United Russia's general council. In the other five regions, four to six parties managed to register their candidates, he said.

Even so, "small parties have significantly boosted" their participation in elections compared with the last regional polls in March, said Tatyana Voronova, a State Duma deputy with United Russia who heads the party's working group reviewing complaints about electoral violations.

More opposition candidates were refused registration for elections in March than during the current campaign, she said, citing the Right Cause party as an example.

Right Cause, widely seen as a Kremlin project to snatch liberal votes from opposition groups, has put forward more than 1,200 candidates, compared with 190 at the March polls, and saw only 92 of them fail to get on ballots, Voronova said.

Voronova also defended the legitimacy of Russia's polls in recent years, which critics claim are regularly rigged by authorities, saying the number of complaints to the Central Elections Commission about violations has been decreasing every year.

Neverov accused the Liberal Democratic Party and A Just Russia of placing high-profile candidates who do not intend to sit in legislatures — "locomotives" in Russian political slang — on party lists in six and three regions, respectively.

Voronova accused the Communist Party of "trying to undermine elections" in Krasnodar and the Tatarstan city of Almet'yevsk by taking their candidates off the ballot instead of "explaining to the people why they need" the Communist Party. The Communists said they are withdrawing because of harassment by election officials.

She also slammed A Just Russia over purported election law violations, saying the party's campaign materials in Novosibirsk did not include information about the publisher.

Communists said earlier that they faced problems publishing campaign leaflets in Tambov because all local publishers refused to accept orders from any party other than United Russia.

United Russia already controls most legislatures and mayors' offices across the country, but it took a beating in March, failing to get majorities in four regional legislatures and losing the mayoral race in Irkutsk to a Communist-backed candidate — who later joined United Russia.

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