

Presidential Candidates to Be Given Equal, Free TV Time

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All five presidential candidates will be provided an equal amount of free airtime on state-owned TV channels when campaigning in the mass media begins Feb. 4.

Candidates will be given free airtime on channels Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24, Channel One and TV Center-Moscow for commercials, first-person monologues and debates, Kommersant-FM reported Thursday.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has said he will not participate in debates, prompting criticism from his opponents.

Last month state-controlled TV outlets Channel One, NTV and Rossiya-1 covered the presidential candidates for a total of 55 hours, with Putin gaining almost three times as much coverage as any other single candidate, according to data from website Telemarker.ru, Kommersant-FM reported. The channels showed Putin for a little over 23 hours in total, while each other candidate received about eight hours of coverage.

Before the last presidential vote in 2008, critics noted the overwhelmingly disproportionate

coverage by state-owned television of Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev.

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