The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Live Blog: Presidential Election 2012

By Ken Martinez

March 03, 2012



The presidential election is being held Sunday, and The Moscow Times is providing updates on the latest developments throughout the day and into Monday night as the voting results come in. Refresh the page to be sure you're seeing the latest news.

5:48 a.m., Vote Tally Inches Towards Completion, 95% of Ballots Processed; Moscow Vote Gives Prokhorov Second Place; First Rallies Starting: As the vote tally nears its end, the numbers remain largely unchanged. With 95 percent of votes counted, the updated percentages are as follows: Putin: 64.29, Zyuganov 17.14, Prokhorov 7.40, Zhirinovsky 6.25 and Mironov 3.80.

In Moscow, numbers tell a slightly different story. Putin's lead shrinks significantly in the capital, where he received only 48.25 percent of the vote, losing support to Prokhorov, who came in second with 19.39 percent. Zyuganov also made a strong showing, with 18.96 percent of Moscow voters showing support.

The first rallies of the day have already begun in Vladivostok, which is seven hours ahead of Moscow on the country's eastern coast. Members of a pro-Putin group called Honest Votes -

Honest Victory held a rally with 2,500 participants from trade unions, representatives of public organizations, and the All-Russian People's Front, Gazeta.ru reported.

3:59 a.m., Vote Tally Update With 85% of Ballots Processed: Vladimir Putin is still winning by a huge margin; Gennady Zyuganov is still in second by about 10 points; and Mikhail Prokhorov has widened his lead over Vladimir Zhirinovsky. Here's the latest tally with 85 percent of votes counted:

Vladimir Putin (United Russia): 64.84 percent

Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party): 17.02 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov (independent candidate): 7.02 percent

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party): 6.31 percent

Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia): 3.73 percent

3:17 a.m., Putin Holding Steady at Almost 65% as Vote Count Continues: The Central Elections Commission has now processed 80 percent of cast ballots, with the following results (via Interfax):

Vladimir Putin (United Russia): 64.71 percent

Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party): 17.10 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov (independent candidate): 6.99 percent

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party): 6.38 percent

Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia): 3.74 percent

3:08 p.m., Putin Says Tears Were From Wind, That He Expected Victory, and Is Ready to Hold Dialogue With Opposition: Projected winner Vladimir Putin said the tears in his eyes seen by millions on national TV during his speech at a rally last night were caused not by the emotion of victory, but by the wind.

"There was wind, wind. Real [tears] from wind," he said at a meeting with supporters at his campaign headquarters.



Putin said his election win was not a surprise, since polls had shown him far ahead of his rivals.

“Our sociologists have learned well how to predict future results, learned how to scientifically manipulate [data]. So, the results for me were not a surprise, although confirmation of them is very pleasant,” he said.

The prime minister’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin was and always has been prepared to hold talks with the opposition, as long as they are on topics that assist “the common good.” But Peskov could not say what, if any, political reforms Putin would be prepared to advance as president.

2:41 a.m., With 70% of Results in, Putin Holds Steady at 65% of Votes: Here’s a full rundown of the latest tally, as reported by Gazeta.ru, with 70 percent of ballots processed by the Central Election Commission:

Vladimir Putin (United Russia): 64.90 percent

Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party): 17.01 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov (independent candidate): 6.85 percent

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party): 6.45 percent

Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia): 3.71 percent

2:28 a.m., In Chechnya, Almost 100% Turnout, Votes for Putin: The North Caucasus republic of Chechnya seems to have maintained its recent tradition of spectacularly high voter turnout this election cycle. With 42 percent of polling stations reporting, the turnout was 99.59 percent, Interfax reported. An even higher 99.73 percent of those voters supported the likely winner, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

2:12 a.m., Non-Official Count by Elections Watchdog Differs Markedly From Official Tally:

While the Central Elections Commission continues to make its official count, independent monitoring organizations have begun tallying the votes from copies of protocols obtained by observers. Election watchdog Golos has been steadily updating their (very partial) count, which takes its statistics from protocols of voting at polling stations across the country, although of around 1,100 ballot reports processed thus far none came from the republics of the North Caucasus, which typically have very high turnout and are expected to show strong support for Vladimir Putin. The Golos count is quite different than that of the Central Elections Commission, with Putin receiving more than 10 points fewer and Mikhail Prokhorov having a much stronger showing:

Vladimir Putin (United Russia): 51.32 percent

Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party): 19.27 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov (independent candidate): 16.14 percent

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party): 6.37 percent

Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia): 5.07 percent

It should be reiterated that this is an incomplete, non-official, but independent count of votes.

1:37 a.m., Up to Nearly 65% for Putin Nationwide: With 60 percent of ballots processed by the Central Elections Commission, Vladimir Putin's vote tally is up to almost 65 percent. Here are the results for all the candidates, via Interfax:

Vladimir Putin (United Russia): 64.65 percent

Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party): 17.08 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov (independent candidate): 6.91 percent

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party): 6.58 percent

Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia): 3.72 percent

12:01 a.m., Vote Total for Putin Up to Almost 64%: Another update on the vote tallies, with 40 percent of ballots processed, via RIA-Novosti:

Vladimir Putin (United Russia): 63.88 percent

Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party): 17.24 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov (independent candidate): 7.1 percent

Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party): 6.93 percent

Sergei Mironov (A Just Russia): 3.73 percent

And elections chief Vladimir Churov said that after a third of ballots had been processed,

turnout was at 64 percent, the same percentage as in the 2008 presidential race, Interfax reported. Churov called Russian voters "the best voters in the world, who once again showed a high level of activity."

11:34 p.m., Putin's Victory Speech at Manezh: Some more quotes from Vladimir Putin's speech to supporters at Manezh:

"This was not just an election for the presidency of Russia—this was a very important test for all of us, for our entire people. This was a test of political maturity, of independence," he said.



"We showed that truly no one can impose anything on us. No one and not anything. We showed that our people are truly in a condition to distinguish desire for novelty, for renewal, from political provocations that have only one goal—to bring down the Russian government and to usurp power. The Russian people showed today that such possibilities and scenarios will not pass on our land. They will not pass!" Putin said.

There is video of his appearance with President Dmitry Medvedev at the website of the United Russia party.

11:05 p.m., Putin Speaks at Manezh Rally; Updated Vote Results: Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev appeared on stage at a rally on Manezh Square next to the Kremlin. Medvedev spoke first, thanking attendees for supporting "our candidate." Putin took the stage next, and with what looked like tears in his eyes thanked all the people who said "Yes" to a strong country. "We won in an open and honest battle," he said. The pair's appearance was shown on national television, and cameras panned out from the stage, revealing a massive crowd sprawled out around the pair.

Interfax has reported updated vote tallies for the top three candidates with 30 percent of ballots processed:

Vladimir Putin: 63.39 percent

Gennady Zyuganov: 17.28 percent

Mikhail Prokhorov: 7.31 percent

10:44 p.m., Putin to Attend Rally at Manezh; Supporters Play Foosball at Lubyanka: Vladimir Putin will make an appearance at a rally celebrating his expected victory in today's presidential vote at Manezh Square, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, RIA-Novosti reported. We'll keep you updated on the proceedings there.

Meanwhile, at nearby Lubyanskaya Ploshchad, Putin supporters have set up a foosball table (photo courtesy of Moscow Times journalist Alexandra Odynova):



10:26 p.m., Prokhorov Says He Won't Become Part of Putin Government; Updated Election Results: Billionaire presidential candidate Mikhail Prokhorov has said he will not accept any post in the government if appointed by Vladimir Putin, RIA-Novosti reported. "I will build a political party that will fight for power," he said, adding that he plans to run for president again in the 2018 election.

Many commentators have pointed out that Prokhorov seems to have collected more votes than predicted by opinion polls, and has done particular well in larger metropolitan areas.

With 20 percent of the vote counted, the Central Elections Commission is reporting updated tallies, via Interfax:

Vladimir Putin: 62.47 percent
Gennady Zyuganov: 17.66 percent
Vladimir Zhirinovksy: 7.59 percent
Mikhail Prokhorov: 7.47 percent
Sergei Mironov: 3.66 percent

10:05 p.m., Huge Crowd Gathers at Manezh Square for Pro-Putin Rally: Police said 100,000 people have gathered at Manezh Square to attend a victory celebration for Vladimir Putin, Interfax reported. Participants of the rally began to gather at 8 p.m., moving down Tverskaya Street toward a stage erected at the square, and many are still arriving. Some participants are holding Russian tricolor flags.



A Moscow Times journalist at the scene reported that many of the participants are members of youth organizations and people bused in from other cities. The reporter interviewed two power station workers from the peat-rich town of Shatura.

One said he voted for Putin because "there is no one else to vote for." He said, "It's not better or worse under Putin" for his work.



When asked whether they were forced to come to the rally, he said, "No, the workers were promised a double paycheck and a comp day."

His colleague said with a shiny smile of gold teeth that he voted for Prokhorov but didn't mind going to the rally.

They declined to give their names and hurried to the bus because of the frigid temperatures.

At 9:30 p.m. an event began at Lubyankskaya Ploshchad organized by a coalition of youth movements called The Headquarters of United Actions. Interfax reported the event had drawn just over 100 participants.

9:42 p.m., Udaltsov: 'They Spit in Our Faces Again': Opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov slammed the vote on Twitter and called on supporters to attend a demonstration tomorrow:

"This is not elections, this is a disgrace. They spit in all our faces again. Tomorrow we go out on the streets! Moscow, March 5, 19:00," he wrote.

9:37 p.m., Putin Campaign Head Calls Vote 'Cleanest in History': The head of Vladimir Putin's campaign Stanislav Govorukhin said the election was the "cleanest in the history of Russia," Kommersant-FM reported.

He said people expressed "their love and respect for the prime minister" with their votes.

9:19 p.m., Exit Polls Have Putin Winning With 58.3% of Vote: Exit polls from state-run pollster VTsIOM are predicting Vladimir Putin will receive 58.3 percent of the vote, followed by Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov with 17.7 percent. Billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov is predicted to come in third place with 9.2 percent, Liberal Democrat Vladimir

Zhirinovsky fourth with 8.5 percent and A Just Russia candidate Sergei Mironov fifth with 4.8 percent, Lenta.ru reported.

9:14 p.m., Putin Leads Initial Count With 61.7% of Vote: The first results are in. With 14.5 percent of ballots counted, Vladimir Putin leads the candidates with 61.7 percent of the vote, followed by Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov with 17.85 percent. Liberal Democrat Vladimir Zhirinovsky is in third with 8.01 percent, billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov is in fourth place with 7.5 percent and A Just Russia candidate Sergei Mironov is in fifth with 3.67 percent, Channel One reported.

8:56 p.m., Communists Say Vote Not Fair; Moscow Police Say No Serious Violations: The head of Communist Party candidate Gennady Zyuganov's campaign headquarters said they cannot consider the election free or fair in light of the many reports of violations.

"Unfortunately, we cannot consider these elections fair or free, since throughout the entire day we have received an enormous number of reports from election commission members, from observers and simply from citizens who identified blatant violations over the course of voting," said Ivan Melnikov on Sunday evening, Interfax reported.

Meanwhile, a Moscow police spokesman used the same language as Melnikov but said voting took place without any "blatant violations identified," Interfax reported.

8:39 p.m., Putin Supporters Begin Rallies in Central Moscow: Demonstrations in support of Vladimir Putin have kicked off in central Moscow, at locations including Manezh Square next to the Kremlin; Lubyanskaya Ploshchad near the Federal Security Service building and the Central Elections Commission building; and Bolotnaya Ploshchad just south of the Kremlin.

"Huge crowds of people are heading in the direction of Bolotnaya to the demonstration; the whole bridge, thousands of people," wrote Kommersant-FM reporter Nikita Batalov on his Twitter account at about 8:25 p.m.

A picture of the scene at Manezh Square at around 8:10 p.m. posted on the Twitter account of an opposition group showed a tightly packed throng of people, many of them waving Russian flags.

8:20 p.m., Election Commission Says Complaints Written Before Vote: The Central Election Commission said they have information indicating it will receive hundreds of complaints of election violations composed before the election actually took place, Interfax reported.

In separate news, an elections commission representative said at about 7:45 p.m. that the commission's site was suffering hacker attacks, though at 8:15 p.m. the site seemed to be operating normally.

Earlier today, Moscow Election Commission head Valentin Gorbunov said the large numbers of reported violations in Moscow came from people who were being paid to report them. He said many of them were just copies of complaints from December's State Duma vote, Gazeta.ru reported.

Independent vote monitoring organization Golos said many of the violations being reported are so-called "carousel" voters and the improper issuance of certificates with no legal force used in place of absentee ballots where they had run out, Gazeta.ru reported. As of 8:15 p.m., 2,654 violations had been reported on Golos's online "Map of Violations," on which ordinary voters and observers can post information about violations.

8:04 p.m., Turnout Reaches 58.3% by 6 p.m.; Polls Close in Moscow: The Central Election Commission said voter turnout nationwide was 58.3 percent as of 6 p.m. Moscow time, Interfax reported. Turnout in the 2008 presidential election was over 64 percent.

Meanwhile, the polls have closed in Moscow. Voting will end nationwide at 9 p.m., when the first exit poll results will begin to be announced. Vladimir Putin is expected to receive the most votes by a large margin.

7:53 p.m., Carousel Voting Caught by Photographer: Photographer Vladimir Andreyev caught images of the now infamous practice of "carousel" voting, in which voters are ferried around to different polling stations to vote multiple times. There were widespread reports of the tactic having been used both in December's State Duma elections and in today's presidential vote.

Here is the bus that transported the voters around the Kurkino district in northwest Moscow:



Participants hid their faces from the camera:





A long line quickly developed at a voting station at which the participants voted:



7:11 p.m., Most Popular Web Camera Feed Is an Apartment in Chechnya: The most-watched live video feed from a polling place web camera was a tiny private apartment in the republic of Chechnya, RIA-Novosti reported.

The feed from Polling Station No. 49, which drew more than 2,500 viewers by noon, showed a room with carpets on the walls, a couch for the election commission, a table with voter lists and ballots, and white plastic lawn furniture. A blue sheet served to hide the voting "booth." The station had the fewest number of voters in Chechnya at 44.

Another polling place in Chechnya that got a lot of attention was one that purported to show Chechen strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov dancing the lezginka.

But Kadyrov's spokesperson denied the report.

"Even if it is Kadyrov, the recording was not done today," Alvi Kerimov told Komsomolskaya Pravda. "Today Kadyrov did not dance. He went to the polling station with his mother, voted and left."

6:27 p.m., Police Mass in Central Moscow for Pro-Putin Rallies: Police forces have begun to mass around the Kremlin and central squares in Moscow in preparation for demonstrations supporting Vladimir Putin scheduled for this evening.

Several large screens have been installed on Manezh Square (pictured below in a photograph taken this afternoon by Moscow Times journalist Kevin O'Flynn) adjacent to the Kremlin, as well as three stages. The square has been closed to the public, Interfax reported.



Exits to the Ploshchad Revolyutsii metro station and several central squares are being guarded by heightened police forces and metal detectors, Intefax reported. The Central Election Commission building at Lubyanskaya Ploshchad is also under heavy guard.

A force of 36,500 people has been stationed in the city for election day, including 16,000 police officers, 14,000 citizen officers, more than 4,000 private security officers and 2,200 traffic officers, Lenta.ru reported.

City leadership has warned that movement around the center may be affected by the large number of rallies planned for today and Monday. There are at least 26 events planned by pro-Kremlin organizations Rossiya Molodaya, Nashi, and Young Guard. The pro-Kremlin groups' rally applications sought permission for a total of 20,000 protestors at the events.

A protest organized by opposition group For Honest Elections is planned for March 5 at 7 p.m. on Pushkin Square with permission from City Hall for 10,000 demonstrators.

Meanwhile, opposition plans to carry out a vote-tabulation event this evening parallel to the official count dubbed the “Night of the Protocol Eaters” have been disrupted by a bomb threat. Opposition leader Ilya Ponomarev said their headquarters at Squat Cafe had been closed by police, who said they received a tip about a bomb in the building.

5:58 p.m., Putin Spokesman Calls Protests 'Stupidity': Presidential candidate Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov called planned protests against an election that has not yet concluded "complete stupidity," Gazeta.ru reported.

Speaking in an interview on Web-based television channel Dozhd, Peskov said the election, just like a person charged with a crime, should be considered legitimate until proven otherwise.

"In our country we are planning demonstrations against something that has not yet taken place. That is complete stupidity. Let's proceed from the idea that just as there is a presumption of innocence for a person, which is the supreme achievement of law, then there should also be a presumption of legitimacy for elections," he said.

He added that while the Putin campaign is "ready for everything," they consider it a "necessity to win in the first round."

City Hall last week approved an opposition plan to hold a rally at Pushkin Square on Monday to protest the presidential vote. In an invitation to participants posted on Facebook, event organizers said the election was illegitimate because independent candidates were not allowed to run and the main TV channels "worked for one candidate — Vladimir Putin."

5:05 p.m., Navalny Calls Violations 'Irrefutable', Implores People to Demonstrate March 5: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny gave a press conference today at which he said voting violations in the presidential vote will have a significant effect on the result and called on people to rally tomorrow in protest, reported Moscow Times journalists Alec Luhn and Kevin O'Flynn.

Speaking at his election day headquarters in the bar Masterskaya, Navalny criticized how the vote has been carried out.



“Now it's become completely obvious that violations that are completely irrefutable are significantly influencing the results of the vote,” he said.

He called on people to demonstrate tomorrow to protest the way the election was held.

“Tomorrow everyone should go out on the streets wherever they want,” he said, implying that it was not just a call to attend the sanctioned opposition rally at Pushkin Square. “We have a right to assemble and it's a citizen's duty to come out and say that we're not happy with what's happened.”

Pro-Kremlin activists have warned that opposition demonstrations following the vote could lead to chaos, but journalist and commentator Oleg Kashin expressed hope that no one would spark violence.

“What will happen tomorrow is interesting. Provocation is the main thing to fear. But in December they also said there would be provocateurs.... All the negative expectations didn't pan out,” he said, referring to the peaceful opposition rallies held in December protesting the results of the State Duma elections, which protesters called illegitimate due to fraud.

“There's also the same hope this time,” Kashin said.

4:10 p.m., An Icy Dip Before Voting: On the lighter side, some voters have decided to dress in costume or in swimsuits to cast their votes. In Barnaul, a group of voters headed by a man in a polar bear costume came in underwear and swimsuits. In Novosibirsk, some voters waded chest deep in ice-cold water, passports held above their heads, before heading to the polling station in their trunks. It was around minus 5 degrees Celsius in Novosibirsk this afternoon.

3:41 p.m., Election Photos From Moscow: Our photographer Vladimir Filonov has uploaded

some shots from polling places and the homes of elderly voters who cast ballots using mobile ballot boxes. We're posting a few here — check back later this evening to see more.

An elderly voter being shown the directions on the ballot:



A child casting his mother's ballot:



Perfume and cosmetics for March 8, Women's Day, on sale at a polling station:



3:26 p.m., Young Voters Bussed Into Moscow From Regions to Vote: Around 100 buses with license plates from surrounding regions have arrived at Bolotnaya Ploshchad in central Moscow carrying voters to polling stations in the capital, Gazeta.ru reported. An estimated 5,000 predominantly young people were brought in on the buses. The square is being guarded by police, and the buses were accompanied by traffic police cars.

The buses came from Voronezh, Ivanovo, Vladimir and other regions, the report said. One student from the city of Petrozavodsk told Gazeta.ru he did not vote in his home city because "here is better."

This is perhaps the most visible example of a practice that has been reported in other areas of Moscow and in other cities, in which buses have carried voters to polling places to vote with absentee ballots or by so-called "additional registration lists" for those voting not at their home polling places.

2:30 p.m., Femen Activists Arrested for Topless Protest at Putin Voting Site: Activists from the Ukrainian group Femen were detained for a shirtless protest at the polling station at Russian Academy of Sciences where Vladimir Putin and his wife voted earlier today, RIA-Novosti reported. The three women stripped to the waist and began to shout anti-government slogans. They were arrested and taken away in a police vehicle. One of the activists had the words “I steal for Putin” written on her chest.

2:15 p.m., Steady Flow of Violations Reported Through Social Media; Several Arrests Made: Social media sites like Twitter are playing a large role in efforts to track violations of election law, with numerous messages identifying the license plates and locations of suspected “carousel” vehicles used to ferry recruits to vote at multiple polling stations. Users are also posting links to the camera feeds of polling stations where they say violations have been

spotted.

The number of people watching Web cameras installed at polling stations live has been increasing steadily throughout the day, reaching almost 415,000 by 1:25 p.m. The cameras are accessible at webvybory2012.ru.

Other websites are helping to gather data, like kartanarusheniy.org, which shows a map of cities around Russia marked by the number of voting violations cited there by elections watchdog Golos.

Several arrests of people attempting to vote using other people's names have been made by police. A man was arrested at Moscow Polling Station No. 1928 who said he wanted to test the "alertness of the police," RIA-Novosti reported. Another two young people were arrested in Zelenograd.

1:32 p.m., Putin's Wife Spotted; Prokhorov Votes in Krasnoyarsk: Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his wife Lyudmila voted at Polling Station No. 2079 at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Lyudmila Putina had not been seen in public with her husband since 2010, during the national census, and their relationship is the subject of much media speculation. According to one rumor, she resides most of the time in a cloister outside Moscow.

Billionaire candidate Mikhail Prokhorov voted earlier today in the curiously named village of Memory of 13 Fighters in the Krasnoyarsk region in Siberia. He said he was very glad to become the first presidential candidate to vote in the middle of the country, RIA-Novosti reported. Then, he proceeded to hop a plane to come back to Moscow, where he is scheduled to be by evening.

12:56 p.m., 15% Turnout Nationwide at 10 a.m.; Large Numbers of Voters Observed in Moscow, Grozny: The Central Elections Commission said voter turnout for all of Russia was above 15 percent at 10 a.m., Interfax reported. Polls opened at 8 a.m. in each time zone and will close at 8 p.m. Total turnout in the 2008 presidential vote was over 64 percent.

Moscow Times journalist Andrew McChesney reports that at least 100 voters were in the halls of Polling Stations No. 267 and 168 in northern Moscow when he visited them this morning. He has stopped by polling stations for national elections since 1999 and said he had never seen so many voters. "Usually it's 10-15 mostly elderly at any given time," he said.

Video feeds from web cameras set up in polling stations in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, showed large masses of people. Chechnya has become known for reporting remarkably high voter turnout; in December's State Duma elections, it reached 99 percent. By noon today, the turnout across the North Caucasus republic was over 50 percent, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said, Interfax reported.

Here, voters line up to receive ballots at Polling Station No. 406 in Grozny at 12:45 p.m.:



12:28 p.m., Police Say Few Violations Thus Far; Communists Describe Car Chase After Ballot Box: The Interior Ministry said everything is going as planned in the election, without significant abnormalities, Interfax reported. But a police spokesperson did note that the vote "has not managed to avoid [some] small excesses." The news agency did not clarify what he meant by "excesses" or provide examples.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party has an incredible story on their website about a car chase in the Tula region involving election observers, who were reportedly racing after elections workers taking a mobile ballot box to voters wanting to cast ballots at home.

The report said two ballot boxes in voting district 961 were taken by election workers for voting by 300 people outside the polling place, which is apparently 30 percent of all the voters at that voting station, an unusually high percentage.

A local Tula lawmaker then blocked the road with his car so that observers could not travel with election workers to people's homes, the report said. Observers apparently were able to get around the car, however, and gave chase to the election workers.

11:17 a.m., Resting Hopes on Navalny: An election observer in the South Tushino area of Moscow just spoke on radio station Kommersant-FM, saying at his polling station there has been a steady stream of voters being bussed in to vote on what is called "additional voting lists." He asked the chairman of the local election commission what was going on and was told they were employees of local factories who had registration in other regions. Reports have been flooding in on Twitter of people being bussed into vote at certain polling places.

The observer who spoke on Kommersannt-FM said, "I took a lot of photographs. I'm going to give them to Navalny, and he'll sort things out." He was evidently referring to anti-corruption blogger and prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been re-

tweeting reports of falsifications and violations all morning.

10:57 a.m., Not-So-Secret Voting Booths: Liberal Democratic Party candidate Vladimir Zhirinovsky complained this morning that the voting booths at his polling station did not properly hide how people were voting. "It's not a booth, but a pen, a profanation," he told Interfax. "I see what a person is doing in that booth. It is not a booth for secret voting." Zhirinovsky voted at polling station 2589 in a school in western Moscow.

There was video evidence that a booth at a polling place in Grozny did not conceal how people were filling out their ballots: the camera was pointed such that viewers could see quite clearly how people were voting. Images also showed multiple people entering a booth at the same time, a violation of elections law:



A link to the camera feed was spread on Twitter, and now the camera has been adjusted so that it is no longer pointed toward the booth.

9:56 a.m., Cast Your Ballot, Have a Snack: One hallmark of voting stations in the Soviet Union and now in Russia has been the presence of snack bars for hungry voters, and sometimes music or even live performances to keep them entertained. At one Moscow polling station, an impressive array of baked goods was available this morning (photo courtesy of Moscow Times reporter Nikolaus von Twickel):



At this voting station in Makhachkala, regional capital of the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, festive tunes have been coming out of the speaker pictured here at full volume since 8:30 a.m.:



9:17 a.m., Voter Turnout in Far East Higher Than in 2008: It's early evening in the Far East of the country, and voter numbers have already begun to be reported. Turnout has been higher so far than in the previous presidential election. The Kolyma region has reported seven

percent higher turnout, with slightly more than 40 percent of voters having cast their ballots by 3 p.m. local time (7:00 a.m. in Moscow). In the Kamchatka region, where it is currently just after 5 p.m., 46 percent of voters have already been to the polls.

9:06 a.m., Absentee Ballots Running Out: Reports have been coming in from regions around Russia the last few days about voting stations running out of absentee ballots. Sixty percent of polling places in Moscow have run out, and at least one station ran out of the ballots already on Friday, RBK reported. Elections chief Vladimir Churov has denied knowledge of a shortage, RIA-Novosti reported.

Absentee ballots can be picked up both before election day, or even on the day of the vote, for those who cannot vote at a place where they are only temporarily registered to live.

8:42 a.m., Voting Station Dancing: Web cameras have been set up in voting stations across the country for this election, in an effort initiated by candidate Vladimir Putin to increase transparency, after opposition complaints about violations during December's State Duma vote. The feeds from these cameras have been up and running since Saturday morning, and while they are meant to catch instances of fraud, viewers have also spotted some amusing images. At one station in the Tyumen region on Saturday, a retirement party was in full swing, with a table set with drinks and plates and people dancing up a storm:

But many of the feeds show typical scenes of people gathered around registration tables and dropping ballots into the boxes (called "urns" in Russian). Here, men dressed almost exclusively in black stand around a voting station in the Urus-Martan region of Chechnya at about 8:20 a.m. this morning:



We will continue to watch for interesting video and photos being posted online—there will undoubtedly be many put on YouTube today.

8:07 a.m., Polls Open in Moscow: The polls have opened in Moscow, and citizens are now voting across Russia, except in Kaliningrad, where voting will begin in an hour. We expect results of exit polls to begin to be announced around 9 p.m. Moscow time; the polls close in each time zone at 8 p.m.

One new phenomenon in this election cycle has been the rise of civic organizations recruiting and training observers to monitor polling places, so we will be keeping an eye out to see whether there is an increase in reports of fraud. During December's State Duma elections, journalists and observers posted videos and photos online throughout the day of alleged voting violations.

Friday, 9:04 p.m., Footage From Voting Station Web Camera Shows Staging of Phony Video: This week Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and elections chief Vladimir Churov have accused the opposition of a complicated scheme wherein phony videos have staged scenes of fraud being committed in the upcoming presidential vote — videos that Putin and Churov said were to be presented after the vote to discredit the results. Members of the opposition have called this absurd and have shot back that pro-Kremlin groups were likely behind the making of the short films.

A video posted online Thursday appears to raise this already convoluted storyline to the level of grand postmodern farce.

The YouTube video shows footage apparently from one of the web cameras that have been set up in voting stations across the country in recent weeks as part of a campaign initiated by Putin to increase transparency. Some of the cameras have been recording footage in test mode this week.

This video recorded what is apparently a crew shooting one of the phony films referred to by Putin and Churov.

The footage begins with low voices audible in the background; a man in a police uniform walks around in front of the camera. Then, a man's voice is heard shouting, "Camera ready? Okay, attention! Everyone ready?"

"Action! First karouselshchik," the voice says next. He is evidently referring to an actor playing the role of a participant in a so-called "carousal" scheme, in which voters stuff ballot boxes at multiple voting sites.

"Mr. election commission chairman, a violation!" a woman's voice says after a few seconds.

"What violation?" an older man's voice responds. A conversation between three voices about a voting violation follows.

Then, a woman's voice is heard shouting, "Did you film it?"

The voice of the man apparently directing the scene is then heard noting a problem with the way "the policeman stood somewhere over there while the commission chairman worked things out."

Some opposition bloggers quickly suggested this was proof that pro-Kremlin groups were behind the fake videos, pointing out that voting sites — which are typically located in schools or other municipally owned buildings — are often controlled by officials who support the ruling authorities. But an opposition group also could have gained access to the space.

In any case, the footage simultaneously reveals the apparent benefits and limitations of the web cameras. While it does uncover potentially illegal fraud —not voting fraud, but the shooting of bogus videos purporting to show voting fraud — the images do not include many faces of those present, leaving it difficult to tell who was responsible.

Friday, 7:20 p.m., Municipal Election Candidate Says He Was Beaten Up: The co-founder of an organization promoting independent candidates in Moscow municipal elections said Friday that he was beaten up while posting campaign materials in an apartment building, Interfax reported.

Peter Miloserdov, a municipal candidate in the Lomonoskovsky region of Moscow and an organizer of the Our City project, which promotes independent candidates in local Moscow elections, said two men approached him and an associate outside an apartment building on Prospekt Vernadskogo, offering them money to cease distribution of a campaign newspaper. After they refused, four other men standing nearby attacked him.

Local police told Interfax that video footage from the site of the alleged attack did not confirm Miloserdov's story. Miloserdov said he called an ambulance to take him to a hospital following the attack.

Municipal elections are being held across the country Sunday along with the presidential vote. In Moscow, 4,183 candidates are running for 1,560 deputy jobs.

Just like independent candidates in the presidential vote, municipal candidates must collect signatures to gain a spot on the ballot — although instead of the 2 million required to run for president, in Moscow the required number for those in local races ranged from 10 to 70, Kommersant reported.

In Moscow, many United Russia members are running as independents, apparently in an attempt to avoid association with the tarnished reputation applied to the ruling party by the opposition, which calls it the "Party of Crooks and Thieves."

Friday, 5:31 p.m., Video Shows Putin as Mr. Burns of 'The Simpsons': A blogger on Friday posted a video by a New York photographer portraying Vladimir Putin's 12 years in power through characters from the long-running American cartoon show "The Simpsons," featuring Putin as Mr. Burns, the sinister boss of a nuclear power plant on the show.

It is the latest video on the topic of politics that has rapidly spread through blogs and Twitter in recent weeks as the presidential election nears.

Putin and Burns have certain physical features in common, making the superimposition look fitting: they're both comparatively short, and they have similar hairlines — bald with a faint horseshoe of gray trim.

The video begins with a yellow-faced Boris Yeltsin appointing Putin president, which marked the beginning of the former KGB officer's term as the nation's paramount leader. The Putin-Burns amalgam quickly dons Mr. Burns' characteristic gleeful and evil grins.

Other prominent figures and images of events from Putin's time as president and prime minister flash quickly around him. Terrorist leader Shamil Basayev, responsible for the Nord-Ost theater hostage crisis in 2002 and the attack on a school in Beslan in 2004, is shown on a wanted poster. Later, his head appears in a jar — he was killed in 2006. Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov stops by to kowtow; President Dmitry Medvedev starts out as a baby, then appears in a Superman costume; former Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov (who is pictured as the mayor from The Simpsons, to whom he bears a striking resemblance) hands Putin a lollipop but is quickly dismissed.

The video concludes with Putin regaining a crown — assumedly symbolizing his retaking the

presidency, which he is expected to do on Sunday — followed by images of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and deposed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak each as Burns as well, evidently drawing a comparison between them and Putin, one that has been made by some demonstrators in recent opposition rallies.

Photographer Noah Kalina, known for his thousands of daily self-portraits in a series started in 2000 called "Everyday," is credited as the creator of the video — along with The Simpsons.

Friday, 5:07 p.m., Report of Utility Workers Paid to Commit Vote Fraud: British TV outlet Sky News has a report out this morning saying orders "from above" have been given to pay 50,000 Moscow utility sector workers about 9,300 rubles ($318) apiece to vote multiple times for Vladimir Putin. A source the channel referred to as "Vadim" said the workers will be instructed to each register at five different voting stations using absentee ballots. The result would be 250,000 votes in Putin's favor.

Similar schemes were noted by observers in December's controversial State Duma elections, the results of which the opposition says were falsified by ruling party United Russia. One widely reported tactic was so-called "carousel" voters, who were bussed around to multiple polling places, where their names were already on voter lists, to stuff ballot boxes.

The Sky News source said the authorities are more wary of that practice this time around due to the increased number of observers expected to be present at voting stations on Sunday.

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