

# United Russia Heavily Favored in Regional Votes

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The Golos elections watchdog started registering violations of the rights of monitors and reporters by elections officials and violations of campaigning rules as soon as the polls started opening. **Maxim Stulov**

The first popular gubernatorial elections since 2005 were held Sunday in five regions, with the ruling party's candidates expected to win in all of them after many of the opposition hopefuls withdrew from the races.

Mayoral elections were also held in cities across the country, including in the Moscow region town of Khimki, where opposition leader Yevgenia Chirikova was running, along with thousands of other local votes, amid scattered reports of elections violations and low turnout in many regional contests.

A total of 4,866 elections took place in the regions Sunday, according to the Central Elections Commission. No elections were held in Moscow.

Voters chose governors in the Bryansk, Ryazan, Belgorod, Novgorod and Amur regions. Mayors were elected in the western city of Kaliningrad as well as in the Moscow region towns of Khimki, Elektrogorsk, Sergiyev Posad and Pushkino, and in other towns across Russia.

United Russia candidates were favored in all the gubernatorial races, and the ruling party was expected to outperform its competitors in many of the local and other regional races as well.

By Sunday afternoon, preliminary results were counted in the Far East, which is seven hours ahead of Moscow. United Russia was leading amid low turnout in votes for the governor of Amur region and legislatures in Vladivostok, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and Sakhalin, media reports said.

Dmitry Travkin, head of United Russia's Central Executive Committee, said the ruling party was leading in the eastern part of the country according to preliminary vote results.

"This is a result of the fact that United Russia had offered an agenda that [Russian] residents understand," Travkin said, according to comments posted on the ruling party's website.

But Communist State Duma Deputy Sergei Obukhov noted that turnout was low in the Far East, calling it "explicit passivity," saying it showed that "voters don't believe that elections will be held honestly," Interfax reported.

Turnout appeared to be particularly low in the Kaliningrad mayoral election, in which just under 13 percent of voters had participated by 3 p.m., Interfax reported.

Golos, Russia's only nationwide independent elections watchdog, began registering election violations soon after the polls opened, including reports that the rights of vote monitors and reporters had been breached at polling places and that rules on campaigning were being broken.

Golos observers said elections officials obstructed monitors and reporters by barring them from entering polling stations, restricting their movements, and limiting their ability to take photos and record video.

On a smaller scale, the organization's members also cited instances of repeated voting by the same groups of people at different polling stations, or so-called carousels, as well as ballot stuffing and voting for other people.

The Central Elections Commission got into a verbal battle with Golos regarding a statement by a Golos official made days before the elections saying that no one expected the contests to be honest, and accused the organization of falsifying reports of violations.

"On Golos' violations map, the statistics are artificially, inflammatorily being slanted to fit that ideologue," deputy elections chief Leonid Ivlev told journalists at the elections commission press center on Sunday, Interfax reported.

Golos director Lilia Shibanova shot back that evidence from the organization showed that the elections were not free and open.

"When we have shown that 74 percent of independent observers were not registered at

polling places; when we have shown inequality in campaigning in the media; when we have shown in long-term observations that there has been a mass withdrawal of candidates, and usually the most active and impressive — all that indeed pointed to the elections in Russia not being able to be called competitive,” Shibanova told Interfax.

Sunday's elections for governors were the first since they were restored earlier this year in legislation seen as a response to mass street demonstrations that broke out in December following a disputed parliamentary vote. Direct gubernatorial elections had been eliminated by President Vladimir Putin in 2004.

Under the law reinstating the elections, gubernatorial candidates must pass multiple so-called “filters.” Hopefuls have to gather signatures from 5 to 10 percent of municipal deputies in a region, and political parties are required to consult with the president before nominating a candidate if the president asks them to.

The incumbent in the far eastern Amur region, Oleg Kozhemyako of United Russia, was set to win his race, gaining 77 percent of the vote with 98 percent of ballots counted, Interfax reported. The next highest vote total went to Communist Party candidate Roman Kobyzov with 10 percent.

In the [Bryansk region](#) near the Belarussian border, Governor Nikolai Denin of United Russia looked to be on course for victory despite low popularity against his sole competitor, Communist Party candidate Vladimir Potomsky.

Candidates from the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and the liberal Yabloko party had withdrawn from the race last week, in moves expected to benefit Denin. A local court had removed Denin from the contest, but he was put back after winning an appeal with the Supreme Court.

Potomsky's vote monitors said they had observed massive ballot stuffing and carousels, Potomsky told Interfax. The turnout was at just under 35 percent in the region at 6 p.m., two hours before polls were set to close, according to the Central Elections Commission.

Dozhd television reported that a Mercedes owned by a local United Russia lawmaker was allegedly used to hand out absentee ballots in the region. When Potomsky's monitors told the people inside the Mercedes that police had been called to examine their activities, the car tried to flee, picking up one of the observers on its hood and carrying him for some 300 meters.

In Ryazan, a region about 150 kilometers southwest of Moscow, United Russia candidate and acting Governor Oleg Kovalyov was also up against a Communist Party hopeful as his main rival, State Duma Deputy [Vladimir Fedotkin](#). Kovalyov was favored in the race.

Fedotkin filed six complaints with the regional elections commission alleging violations, news agency Media Ryazan reported. Turnout stood at just under 35 percent at 6 p.m. in the region.

Multiple candidates, including a popular one from the Patriots of Russia party, had dropped out of the Ryazan race in recent weeks.

The two current governors in the other gubernatorial races — Sergei Mitin in the Novgorod

region and Yevgeny Savchenko in the Belgorod region — were expected to win their elections easily. Turnout stood at 30 percent in Novgorod and about 48 percent in Belgorod at 6 p.m.

In the Novgorod region, monitors of the Liberal Democratic Party's candidate complained to elections officials that detention center officials had coerced prisoners to vote for a certain candidate in exchange for perks, Novgorod.ru [reported](#).

Regional legislatures were elected in regions including the republic of North Ossetia, Krasnodar and Penza, while municipal legislatures were chosen in Barnaul in Altai region, Vladivostok, Kursk and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, among other cities and towns.

[Fights erupted at two polling stations](#) over electoral violations in Vladikavkaz, the regional center of North Ossetia in the North Caucasus, where people voted for the regional legislature and in a number of local elections, Yuga.ru reported.

One fight broke out between elections officials, voters and monitors after observers from the Patriots of Russia party noticed a man who they said tried to vote without a passport. The other fight broke out between observers from Patriots of Russia and other observers after the latter remarked that the Patriots monitors were filming polling stations in unauthorized locations.

The Patriots of Russia party in turn complained that their [monitors in North Ossetia](#) were not allowed to move freely around polling stations and were removed by police when they pointed out violations, party spokesman Yury Fidarov told Regnum.

The regional elections commission refused to comment to Regnum about the party's complaints.

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