The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Archived Live Blog: United Russia Dominates Regional Votes

By Alexander Winning

October 15, 2012



Voters across Russia chose governors, mayors and local lawmakers on Sunday.

Russians went to the polls Sunday to vote in 4,866 elections across the country. Voters chose governors, mayors and local lawmakers. As the official figures are published Monday, we take a look at the results, reaction from party officials as well as any reports about falsifications.

8:30 p.m.: For the final post of the day, Moscow Times reporter Oleg Sukhov summarizes what he saw at a Khimki polling station Sunday.

Opposition candidate Yevgenia Chirikova said Sunday that 200 people had been added to voter lists over the previous night at Polling Station No. 3008 during the mayoral election in Khimki, a suburb of Moscow — a move she interpreted as evidence of vote rigging. During the entire day, observers requested voter lists from the local election committee, but it refused to provide them.

Chirikova, followed by her campaign staff and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny, visited the station after the voting was finished and tried to enter. The police blocked the entrance, and subsequently authorities sent reinforcements.

As several dozen Chirikova supporters and journalists surrounded the entrance, a scuffle took place between Sergei Nazarov, head of the election committee, and observers, who said he was trying to carry away the voter lists in order to hide signs of rigging. During the standoff, Chirikova supporters knocked on the glass, trying to attract attention to presumed violations.

Subsequently, all observers were removed by the committee and left the station, applauded by the crowd. Boris Nadezhdin, an observer and a former member of the Right Cause party, promised to return the expelled election monitors to the building and was allowed to enter.

According to a YouTube video taken from a webcam set up at the station and posted by Navalny, Nadezhdin told the committee that he had phoned Vladimir Churov, head of the Central Elections Commission, about the presumed violations and added: "Do whatever you want but don't expel the observers while they are being shot on camera! [Expletive], we'll have a scandal tomorrow!"

As a result, some of the observers were allowed to re-enter the station but others, including Lyubov Sobol, were not. Sobol was one of the observers actively involved in the standoff with the committee.

5:30 p.m.: Independent elections monitor Golos rejected assertions that Sunday's vote should be taken as a signal that the electoral system is free and fair in Russia.

"So far we haven't moved one iota from the critical situation [we were in] with a lack of real competition and a lack of real elections in Russia," Golos director Lidia Shibanova told Interfax.

Golos said it hadn't observed significant improvements over previous votes, neither in the registration process for candidates, the elections campaigns, nor on the voting day itself.

Shibanova also said that the Central Elections Commission had refused to cooperate with elections monitors.

"Unfortunately, the situation is getting worse with regard to legislative norms, the attitude of elections committees to monitors," she said.

Grigory Melkonyants, deputy director of the organization, said earlier that Golos elections monitors had observed voting Sunday at 1,616 polling stations in 22 Russian regions, as well as running a hotline and "Map of Violations" website to record falsifications.

On its site, Golos published about 850 messages detailing violations of electoral procedure, Melkonyants said.

In turn, Vladimir Churov, chairman of the Central Elections Commission, said that the violations recorded by elections monitors would have influenced the outcomes of the elections "in no way," RIA-Novosti reported.

4:35 p.m.: Commenting on his party's resounding success in Sunday's regional elections, United Russia heavyweight Sergei Neverov said the results demonstrate people's faith in the course set by President Vladimir Putin, the spiritual father of the party.

Neverov, secretary of United Russia's general council, made the comments after elections committees announced that United Russia had swept the board in voting to all six regional legislatures Sunday and that the party's candidates won all five gubernatorial races.

“The measures taken by President Putin to strengthen the Russian state and develop the country socio-economically have brought results,” Neverov said, according to RIA-Novosti.

3:30 p.m.: Responding to regional elections in which their parties were crushed by United Russia, LDPR and Just Russia cried foul on Monday, claiming that the ruling party had made use of administrative resources and underhand tactics to gain the upper hand.

LDPR's flamboyant boss Vladimir Zhirinovsky said his party's elections monitors had spotted more than 130 violations, including ballot-box stuffing, carousel voting (when groups of voters are bussed round polling stations to vote for the same candidate several times), groundless bans on taking video evidence of falsifications and refusing to allow party monitors to polling stations.

Zhirinovsky said his party had sent information on 25 of the gravest violations to the Central Elections Commission.

“We have the potential to get 20 percent [of votes]. They're squeezing us and putting pressure on us the whole time,” Zhirinovsky told journalists at an Interfax news conference.

Sergei Mironov, head of the social-democratic Just Russia party, explained United Russia's runaway victory by the party's use of administrative resources.

“We noticed this due to the multitude of falsifications and other wonders,” Mironov said, adding that opposition parties had grown used to United Russia's methods.

3:05 p.m.: No newly registered parties made it into the six regional legislatures elected Sunday, and opposition parties associated with winter protests against President Vladimir Putin's rule fared no better.

According to results published by regional elections committees, United Russia gained more than 50 percent of the votes in five regions — from Krasnodar to Sakhalin — and still won by roughly 20 percent in the sixth, North Ossetia.

The Kremlin-backed party bagged its highest result in the Saratov region, where it garnered 70 percent more than the Communists, who achieved a meager 8 percent.

Support for the Communist Party hovered between 8 percent and 18 percent, while the Liberal Democratic and Just Russia parties failed to exceed the minimum vote threshold in North

Ossetia, Penza, Krasnodar and Saratov.

In a rare victory, the Patriots of Russia party, founded in 2005 after splitting off from the Communist Party, drew 26 percent of the vote in North Ossetia.

Support for Yabloko or Parnas was nowhere to be seen.

Sunday's regional elections mean that parliaments in the Krasnodar, Sakhalin, Penza and Saratov regions and the North Ossetia and Udmurtia republics will be controlled by the ruling party for the next five years.

2:14 p.m.: In a result that borders on farce, United Russia claimed 100 percent of mandates in municipal elections in Mordovia, winning total control over local government in the small republic 350 kilometers from Moscow, Itar-Tass reported.

All 17 of the party of power's candidates won contests in the republic's seven districts.

The Liberal Democratic Party was United Russia's only competitor in the local votes, at which the turnout was just over 68 percent.

1:56 p.m.: Onto the final gubernatorial election, where again there were no surprises.

Yevgeny Savchenko claimed an easy victory in the Belgorod region, winning the support of 77.64 percent of voters. Irina Gorkova, a senior official in the Liberal Democratic Party, received 12.4 percent of the day's votes. The results were published Monday morning on the Belgorod region's elections website.

Savchenko has headed the Belgorod region since 1993.

Only minor violations were reported on Golos' "Map of Violations" site.

The Central Elections Commission, recapping on voting across the country, told reporters that the highest turnout was recorded in the Belgorod region. Whereas almost 60 percent of registered voters made their choices in Belgorod on Sunday, only 37 attended voting in the Amur region.

1:25 p.m.: In Ryazan, a region about 150 kilometers southwest of Moscow, United Russia candidate and acting Governor Oleg Kovalyov beat his nearest competitor by more than 40 percent of the vote.

Kovalyov took 64.43 percent after all ballots had been counted, Interfax reported. Communist Vladimir Fedotin placed second with 21.92 percent.

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

Suggesting that United Russia used the tactic to limit competition, senior party official Sergei Neverov told RIA-Novosti that candidates who withdrew from gubernatorial races in favor of United Russia could be rewarded with vice-governorships.

No infringements of voters' rights or other violations were reported on the Ryazan region's elections website. However, an elections committee employee told Golos that she witnessed a huge number of falsifications, including discovering whole bunches of votes for Kovalyov stuffed in the ballot box.

She said she had filed several complaints with the Central Elections Commission and that several of her co-workers had signed the written statement.

A Communist Party elections monitor also wrote on Twitter that he had his car tires slashed after he complained about ballot stuffing.

12:40 p.m.: Back to the gubernatorial results, where the historic Novgorod region saw similarly favorable results for the ruling party. United Russia candidate Sergei Mitin secured 75.95 percent of the vote, according to data published on the Central Elections Commission website.

A candidate from the left-leaning Patriots of Russia party, Nikolai Zakharov, took 10.63 percent of votes.

No violations were reported by elections officials, but Golos reported that unidentified individuals were handing out coupons with discounts in local shops in the Novgorod region town of Chudovo. In another town, a reporter told the elections-monitoring group that police removed video-recording equipment at a polling station.

12:18 p.m.: United Russia's candidate has been declared the winner of the Khimiki mayoral election with 47.61 percent of the vote, Interfax reported, citing election officials.

Oleg Shakhov, who had been serving as acting mayor since Vladimir Strelchenko resigned under apparent Kremlin pressure earlier this year, made no immediate comment about the results, which Interfax said came with 100 percent of the vote counted.

But a senior State Duma deputy, Sergei Neverov, told reporters that the ruling party was open to the idea of working with losing candidates Yevgenia Chirikova and Oleg Mitvol.

"If they have good ideas, then, of course, it would be possible to work with them," he said, according to Interfax. "We are always ready to accept and use everything that is constructive, reasonable and focused on the development of the lives of our citizens."

In early counting, opposition leader Chirikova placed second, with 17.13 percent of the vote, in the closely watched election just north of Moscow. Former federal environmental inspector Mitvol was in third, with 14.41 percent.

11:55 a.m.: As observers had predicted, United Russia candidates secured easy victories in all gubernatorial contests.

In the Bryansk region, Governor Nikolai Denin garnered 65.22 percent of the vote. His nearest competitor was Communist Party candidate Vadim Potomsky, who secured 30.83 percent of votes cast, according to RIA-Novosti.

Responding to the results late Sunday, Potomsky was defiant, telling Gazeta.ru that the

official totals “don't correspond with reality.”

“Monitors recorded my victory at all Bryansk polling stations. I can't even imagine where the Central Elections Commission got these figures,” he said.

The eventual victor, Denin, was earlier struck from the ballot after Potomsky claimed he had forged signatures submitted for his candidacy registration. But the Supreme Court reinstated Denin on Thursday, overturning a local court's decision. Denin and Potomsky were the only two candidates registered for Sunday's vote.

At the other end of the country, Oleg Kozhemyako of United Russia — who was bidding to remain governor — won 77.28 percent of the vote in the Amur region, a far eastern region rich in minerals. Communist Party candidate Roman Kobyzov trailed Kozhemyako with 9.99 percent of voters' support.

Independent elections watchdog Golos recorded only one minor violation in the Amur region election, reporting on its website that an elections committee official was reading a Communist Party paper at Polling Station No. 20 in the town of Tynga.

11:20 a.m.: It's not a seat on the Federation Council, but former Leningrad Governor Valery Serdyukov did win by a landslide a weekend vote to become a lawmaker for the Leningrad region settlement of Pervomaisky.

With all ballots counted in Sunday's election for single-mandate electoral district No. 93, Serdyukov won with 76.84 percent, or 146 votes, while Tatyana Bychkov of United Russia had 17.37 percent and Maxim Evarestov of the Liberal Democratic Party had 3.16 percent, Interfax reported.

Leningrad Governor Alexander Drozdenko had said that he intended to appoint Serdyukov as a senator representing the region in the Federation Council if he won the election. But last month he instead appointed a local district head, Igor Fomin, to the post.

In what was widely seen as an attempt to remove unpopular regional leaders before the return of direct gubernatorial elections, President Vladimir Putin replaced Serdyukov with Drozdenko in May.

Former St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko became speaker of the Federation Council after participating in a disputed race for lawmaker of a St. Petersburg district last year. Under the law, only elected officials can be appointed to the Federation Council.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/10/15/archived-live-blog-united-russia-dominates-regional-votes-a18553