

Televised Mayoral Debates Go Unnoticed

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Televised debates between the Moscow mayoral candidates did not stir much interest among audiences, with only half a percent of residents watching the most popular round of debates on Aug. 16.

Sociologists attributed weak interest to acting Mayor Sergei Sobyenin's refusal to participate, Kommersant reported.

A total of eleven debates have been hosted on local television and radio stations leading up to the election on Sept. 8. The twelfth and final debate will be broadcast Friday at 8 p.m. on the radio station Govorit Moskva.

The first three debates were broadcast live in mid-August on the television station Moskva 24 between the five of six mayoral hopefuls: Party of People's Freedom's candidate Alexei Navalny, the Communist Party's Ivan Melnikov, Yabloko's Sergei Mitrokhin, Liberal Democrat Mikhail Degtyaryov and Nikolai Levichev of Just Russia.

The Aug. 16 debate was the most popular and the public opinion center VTsIOM said that 2.9 percent of Muscovites had their televisions on during its time slot, 9 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

An estimated 60,000 viewers watched the entire program, with an additional 40,000 tuning in for parts.

VTsIOM head Valery Fedorov said that Russia does not have a history of political debates and low interest was exacerbated by the “quasi-tradition” of authorities refusing to engage in direct dialogue with the opposition.

Another set of televised debates occurred on Moskva-Doverie, though Navalny declined to participate because they were aired at 8 a.m. The morning debates were watched by just 0.03 percent of residents, roughly 4,000 viewers.

A Public Opinion Foundation poll reported that 73 percent of Moscow residents did not see any part of the debates between the candidates.

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