The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia's State Media: Anti-Clinton, But Not Wedded to Trump

Before the U.S. vote, Russia's biased state press has trashed Clinton, but avoided endorsing Trump

By Alexey Kovalev

November 03, 2016



"Will Trump be assassinated?", state TV host Dmitry Kiselyov asks a week before the Russian Duma elections. **Vesti Nedeli / YouTube**

From the word "go," Russian state media have been largely sympathetic toward Donald Trump. Even prior to the Republican primaries, they reported every minor bump and hiccup in his ratings.

In September, Trump's against-the-odds campaign garnered more attention than Russia's own parliamentary elections. A week before Russians went to the polls to vote for the new Duma, Vesti Nedeli ("News of the Week"), a weekly news review show on state TV channel Rossiya, spent 8 minutes covering the upcoming Russian elections and another 9 discussing

whether Donald Trump might be assassinated. Most national outlets devoted extensive coverage to even the most minuscule revelations from the leaked Democratic National Commission and Clinton staff emails.

But it is an oversimplification to say state media went all out for Trump. They were less for Trump, more staunchly against Clinton. And here they followed President Vladimir Putin's own lead: in 2011, he accused the then-secretary of state of fomenting protests in Russia. Unsurprisingly, his media have not wasted an opportunity to portray Clinton as a Russophobic warmonger.

RIA Novosti, once Russia's largest and most respected news agency, has been the vanguard of the agitprop efforts. To its credit, the agency's DC bureau has provided mostly objective and balanced coverage of the election. But the most popular of RIA's election dispatches, which garnered almost 200,000 page views, went so far as to claim "Clinton has problems with her head."

Few Russian media outlets endorsed Trump outright. Those that did are far from prominent. Parlamentskaya Gazeta, a dull newspaper of record to the Russian parliament's upper chamber, was one such publication. In a September 2015 op-ed, it declared "Donald Trump a self-made man, a trait Americans love, like they love anyone who is the American Dream incarnated." It claimed Trump would be a better leader than Obama, who was a "single issue president" (referring to Obamacare), or Clinton, who was "one of the worst secretaries of state in American history."

Open endorsements were largely absent from the more influential media. Indeed, RT, formerly Russia Today, was largely sympathetic to a Democratic contender, Bernie Sanders, and to third party candidates like Jill Stein. But when Sanders dropped out, RT threw its full weight behind discrediting Clinton.

As the election entered the final weeks, the Russian media focus switched to the supposed illegitimacy of the U.S. elections, implicitly backing Trump's claims about "large scale voter fraud."

"American elections can't be called free and democratic." Read our weekly roundup *of Russian state TV.*

On Oct. 23, Vesti Nedeli did just that. In a long tirade, the program's host, Russian "chief propagandist" Dmitry Kiselyov lamented "the downfall of the American media," criticizing outlets such as Politico for colluding with Clinton's campaign. Another news segment on Channel One called Donald Trump "just as evil" as Clinton, a "boorish adventurist," and a "swindler."

The most noticeable recent shift in the Russian state media coverage of the U.S. elections is the effort to frame their supposed illegitimacy in Russian terms. Fraud techniques at Russian

elections are well-documented — from the so-called “carousels” (repeated voting with absentee ballots at multiple stations) to coercion and the use of “administrative resources” (support from the ruling party’s political machine). Such fraud, witnessed in Russia’s 2011 and 2012 elections, even led to large-scale protests.

Russian state media now have an easy message for their viewers: the same things will happen on Nov. 8. Voskresnoye Vremya (“The Times on Sunday”), a weekly news summary show on Channel One, even titled one of its segments “The Carousel Beckons,” in reference to a Russian-style electoral fraud.

Russia’s propagandists are stopping short of saying that the U.S. elections will be just as fraudulent as the Russian elections have been. After all, that would require an admission of epic state wrongdoing. Rather, they seem more concerned with sowing seeds of doubt among their domestic audience.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/11/03/in-run-up-to-us-vote-russian-state-media-trashed-clinton-but-avoided-endorsing-trump-a56001