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Regional Leaders Secretly Campaign Ahead of Elections Says Monitor

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Vedyaskin Sergei / Moskva News Agency

Acting Russian governors are secretly campaigning and using state funds ahead of elections this weekend, business outlet RBC reported Tuesday, citing a report by election monitoring group Golos.

Voters in 16 Russian regions go to the polls on Sunday to elect their governors. Several other regions and Moscow will also hold local legislative and city council elections that day. Ahead of the vote, acting governors in seven regions have been receiving extensive local media coverage that portrays them in a positive light and "is in fact free PR," RBC reported, citing Golos.

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The acting governors from the republic of Marii-El, republic of Udmurtia, and the Kirov, Ryazan, Saratov, Novgorod and Kaliningrad regions are named as benefitting from positive

media stories. In addition to the seven gubernatorial candidates, the report highlights potential campaign law violations by candidates standing in local legislative elections.

Such expansive media coverage constitutes election campaigning and “seriously discredits” voting as an institution, argues Golos regional network coordinator Vitaly Averin.

While media campaigning is cited as the most common violation of federal election law, acting governors also benefit from the use of state and municipal property, according to Averin, RBC reports. However, such violations are impossible to prove, Averin emphasizes.

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