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Moscow Opposition Makes Gains in Municipal Elections

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Kyrill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

Opposition candidates have gained a majority in more than 10 central Moscow districts during municipal elections held on Sunday, preliminary results show.

Out of around 1,000 candidates put forward by the "United Democrats" opposition movement, some 200 have won seats, the independent Novaya Gazeta outlet reports.

Around one-sixth of the votes across 125 Moscow districts have been counted so far.

"United Democrats" candidates, led by opposition politician Dmitry Gudkov, appear to have secured all 12 seats in a southwestern district where President Vladimir Putin cast his ballot on Sunday.

The district, Gagarinsky, is listed among 13 others where the "United Democrats" gained a majority, the Vedomosti business daily reports.

“We took the center,” Novaya Gazeta quoted campaign manager Maxim Katz as saying.

“United Democrats” leader Dmitry Gudkov wrote on his Facebook page that “our victory is incomplete, but it is a victory.“

The elections were marred by claims of vote rigging, including reports of election monitors being bribed and forced voting in some Moscow districts.

In total, the election monitoring NGO Golos registered around 600 complaints. The Central Elections Committee, however, said there had been no grave violations during Sunday’s vote.

Despite traditionally attracting little interest, this year’s vote is seen widely as a bellwether for next year’s mayoral elections in Moscow and the presidential race.

Opposition politicians have accused the city authorities of deliberately trying to downplay the elections to secure a lower turnout, especially in Moscow, where the opposition has a larger presence.

Around 15 percent of Muscovites turned up to vote on Sunday, which is roughly half the turnout in parliamentary elections last year.

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