The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin's Party Says Secures Parliament Supermajority

September 20, 2021

With 90% of the votes counted by midday on Monday, United Russia was ahead with nearly 50%. **Arzu Pashayeva / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin's party United Russia claimed a landslide victory in parliamentary and regional elections that have been marred by claims of widespread voter fraud after an unprecedented crackdown on monitors and opposition candidates.

According to Interfax, Andrei Turchak, United Russia's general council secretary, told reporters that the results as of early Monday showed the party gaining 315 seats in the 450-seat State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament.

With its two-thirds supermajority, United Russia will continue enacting Putin's policy initiatives unhindered for the next five years despite losing 21 seats during the three-day voting period that kicked off Friday.

With 99% of the votes counted by midday on Monday, United Russia was ahead with nearly 50%, followed by the Communist Party with almost 20%. Turnout was 51.68% of eligible

voters.

Scores of Communist Party members received a boost from the allies of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, whose electoral network was declared "extremist" ahead of the vote and allies shut out of the ballot.

Navalny's team last week published a list of 1,234 registered candidates it urged supporters to vote for in order to have the best chance of unseating United Russia incumbents.

Google, Google-owned YouTube and Apple deleted Navalny's recommendations under pressure from the Kremlin as voting got underway, stirring outrage among activists and observers.

The poll results showed three other parties — including the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), the revamped social-democratic A Just Russia and the upstart New People — passing the 5% electoral threshold needed to gain Duma seats.

All four parties are considered to be part of Russia's "systemic opposition," a term that refers to factions that do not pose a serious challenge to the Kremlin in exchange for being allowed to compete in Russia's uneven electoral playing field.

Turchak said the party had not detected significant violations that could sway election results despite dozens of videos posted on social media showing alleged ballot stuffing, disappearing ink and ballot boxes with secret doors and unsealable seals.

Russia's Central Election Commission said late Sunday that only 12 cases of ballot stuffing had been confirmed across the entire country. The independent election-monitoring NGO Golos, which Russian authorities blacklisted as a "foreign agent" ahead of the vote, said it received nearly 5,000 reports of violations.

"United Russia's victory in the State Duma elections was clean and honest," the party said in a statement on its website.

The Kremlin echoed these comments on Monday.

"The competitiveness, openness and honesty of the elections were and are the most important thing for the president," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The European Union, meanwhile, denounced what it said was a climate of intimidation in the run-up to the vote and complained of a lack of independent election observers.

AFP contributed reporting.

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