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Voting Begins in Russia's 2024 Regional Elections

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Kirill Kukhmar / TASS

Voting in Russia's three-day local and regional elections began on Friday, with Kremlin-backed candidates expected to dominate a political landscape all but devoid of meaningful competition.

Voters will elect governors in 21 regions, legislative assembly members in 13 regions, including two in annexed Crimea, and scores of local officials on Sept. 6-8.

In the Kursk region, a handful of municipal elections were postponed after Ukrainian forces launched a surprise cross-border incursion on Aug. 6. However, the gubernatorial race has gone ahead as planned, starting early on Aug. 28, despite Russia not having full control of the territory.

Local election officials in the Kursk region were equipped with bulletproof vests and helmets for safety as the voting began. Russia's election chief Ella Pamfilova said Friday that turnout in the embroiled border region had already reached 40%.

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Moscow, which is electing all 45 members of its City Duma, eliminated paper ballots in favor of online voting. The capital is one of 25 regions offering online voting this election cycle, though state employees have voiced concerns about being pressured to vote online since the system was introduced in 2020.

Yabloko, a liberal opposition party advocating for a ceasefire in Ukraine, had all of its candidates barred from running in St. Petersburg's local elections. However, nearly 60 candidates from the party managed to make the ballot in races across eight regions.

Meanwhile, the independent election watchdog Golos reported more than 250 complaints of violations in the first hours of voting on Friday.

Russia's Central Election Commission is expected to release the voting results by Sept. 28.

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