



Statement on the Results of Civic Election Observation

Local elections September 13, 2015 Russian Federation

On September 13, 2015, more than ten thousand elections took place in Russia, including the elections of 21 governors, 11 deputies of regional parliaments, and elections of representative bodies of 25 regional capitals. The 2015 local elections are the last full-scale dress rehearsal of the Russian electoral system—in preparing, organizing, and conducting an Election Day—before the upcoming 2016 national elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation.

Representatives of the “Golos” movement conducted public monitoring procedures for voting, counting of votes at polling stations, and tabulation at higher election commissions for elections in 26 regions: Astrakhan, Vladimir, Voronezh, Ivanovo, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Kaluga, Kirov, Kostroma, Kurgan, Leningrad, Lipetsk, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Orel, Rostov, Ryazan, Samara, Tver, Tomsk, Chelyabinsk Region, the Republic of Bashkortostan, Mari El, Tatarstan, and Krasnodar regions. “Golos” received additional information from the election regions through other channels as well, including a hotline (8 800 333-33-50), a “Map of Violations” (www.kartanarusheniy.org), and our media partners.

Among the most common violations on Election Day were: restrictions of observers’ rights, the rights of commission members, and the rights of media representatives (the hotline “Golos” and the “Map of Violations” received 225 messages), as well as violations related to early voting, voting by absentee ballots, voting outside the polling station (143 messages), forcing people to vote, and violation of vote secrecy (96 messages). On Election Day, “Golos” reported various instances of such violations in publications, press releases from regional branches, and via the regular video feed of the call center and the press center.

“Golos” is guided by internationally accepted standards of election monitoring and strictly adheres to political neutrality as one of the main conditions for independent and impartial election observation. Although technological support for elections has improved in recent years (transparent ballot boxes, the use of an optical scan voting system, and so on), in this statement “Golos” chiefly highlights the *problematic* features of the elections, in order to emphasize the importance of detecting such problems for preserving the constitutional order and the country’s future.

According to the results of the public monitoring of elections scheduled for September 13, 2015, we conclude that **the institution of elections in Russia is discredited by the unregulated use of administrative technologies**, which has a negative impact on the course of election campaigns, makes them unfree and unequal, and, as a consequence, distorts the election results, casting doubt on their authenticity and legitimacy.

The 2015 Election Campaign reinforced an emerging trend over the last couple of years: the shifting of emphasis in the application of administrative technologies from voting day to earlier stages of the electoral process. **In fact, the results in the vast majority of election campaigns were predetermined by decisions and actions taken by the authorities and election commissions organizing the elections at the stage of nomination and registration of candidates and parties, as well as during the election campaigns.** In such a situation—and in the absence of real political competition—the results of the elections are determined in advance, and Election Day merely confers upon them a formal “legitimation.”

The 2015 Election demonstrated that the organizers (regional and local authorities), guided by their personal and, at times, vested interests, and after having a “positive” experience from the previous campaigns (when the operating motto was “anything goes”), now essentially ignore the federal government’s declaration that it will prevent electoral law violations and ensure “the competitive nature of the elections with unpredictable results.”

At all stages of the election campaign in 2015, and in almost all the regions where the elections took place, **the electoral commissions organizing the elections** are selective and biased in their decisions to deny certain candidates and parties their right to fair and equal treatment.

Opposition candidates encountered **direct obstruction of their nomination and registration** by election commissions organizing the elections, and by regional and local administrations.

Signatures collection in support of election nominations is discriminatory. For example, expert statements pertaining to invalid signatures and the intentional use of the old Federal Migration Service (FSM) database, almost always put an end to a party’s or candidate’s prospects of taking part in the elections, even if there is strong evidence that the collected signatures are indeed authentic.

Administrative resources, an integral part of the Russian election process, traditionally affect—and even determine—election campaigns, “programming” their outcome. Regional and local authorities use their administrative capacities to create advantages in the election campaign for certain political forces, as well as to exert pressure on undesired election participants.

From the start of the elections to the tabulation of ballots at voting stations, **the abuse of power resources** is a very common way of obstructing the lawful activities of candidates, parties, party election headquarters, and observers in regions such as Tatarstan, Irkutsk, Kaluga, Kostroma, and Novosibirsk.

In almost all the monitored regions, we observed that **media coverage mostly favored pro-government candidates and parties**, such as by distributing indirect and covert

campaign materials in their favor, and by promoting campaign materials with negative content against their opponents—all of which is evidence of unequal access of candidates and parties to the media. An integral part of **unfair competition** in the elections was the damage, destruction, and removal of campaign materials.

For the first time in these elections, “Golos” analyzed **election campaign financing** for the election of heads of subjects of the Russian Federation. Results of the study clearly show that the financing system for the election funds of parties and candidates is extremely opaque. It allows candidates with administrative resources to use budgetary funds to finance their campaigns. In addition, it allows many candidates and parties to receive funding from companies listed abroad. The largest amounts of foreign funds were received by candidates nominated by “United Russia,” the current ruling political party. Further opaqueness is created by **public funds linked to political parties** which accumulate a significant portion of party funds, but whose donors are not publically disclosed.

A prominent feature of the elections was a sharp reduction in the number of candidates nominated through **self-nomination**, especially in the regional campaigns.

The practice of bringing to justice election commission members for electoral law violations, for the period from 2009 to 2015, showed that administrative penalties applicable to members of electoral commissions are insignificant in terms of both the amount of the fine and the severity of additional consequences. In some cases, refusals to initiate proceedings or discontinuance of prosecutions by state prosecutors are surprising, especially when there is extensive material and video evidence of the offense.

Changes in regional legislation concerning the regulation of elections and the organization of local government are openly opportunistic and do not aim to improve the realization of voting rights, but rather to cause their artificial and unjustified restriction.

Instability of the electoral law, the absence of guarantees provided by the law for public election observation; failure to comply with the presumption of equality among candidates and political parties; the influence of administrations on the regional election commissions organizing the elections—all these are part of a trend that makes it impossible to hold free and fair elections.

Early voting was widely used in almost all the election regions with the goal of creating “attendance surges” and to ensure voting for pro-government candidates. Evidence of this practice comes from reports from our representatives in the regions, as well as from posts in the “Map of Violations” and in the media.

There was a particularly high number of early voters in the following regions: Primorsky Krai, Leningrad (gubernatorial elections: 4.66% of the total number of voters and 10.91% of the total vote, according to the official state IT system “Election”), Orel region (the election of the city council deputies of Orlovsky: 4.22% of the total number of voters, 12.98% of the total vote, according to “Election”), Ryazan region (election of deputies of the Ryazan Regional Duma: 1.93% of the total number of voters, 5% of the vote, according to

“Election”). For comparison, the share of early voting in the election of deputies of the City Duma in Tomsk was only 2.23% of the total number of voters.¹

Observation on September 13 shows the continuation of the use of illegal techniques on Election Day:

- Explicit distortion of the will of the voters (direct rigging):
 - ballot box stuffing;
 - “carousel voting” (when, after obtaining absentee ballots, voters are bussed around several polling stations, casting votes at each of them);
 - rewriting of protocols.
- Disturbances that may affect the will of the voters:
 - vote buying;
 - violation of the rights of voters, pressure from authorities;
 - illegal campaigning;
 - “bussing” of voters;
 - violation of the rights of observers, commission members, and representatives of the media;
 - procedural violations during the vote count.

By the end of Election Day, as expected, there were increasingly more violations committed during the procedure of vote counting and violations linked to the removal of observers from “problematic” polling stations, namely those which are suspected to have seen ballot stuffing, the manipulation of mobile voting, and other irregularities.²

Violations in mobile voting were recorded throughout the country, mostly in the Kostroma and Chelyabinsk regions, in Krasnodar and Tatarstan, in the Ivanovo, Omsk, Orel, Samara, and Tomsk regions, as well as in other regions. In many cases, the official registers for voting outside the premises were not used, and unknown lists were used instead. Observers were often denied the right to inspect them, and frequently the requisite voter statements for mobile voting were unavailable. This created opportunities for ballot manipulation outside polling stations. There were reports of voting via mobile ballot boxes by persons who had not submitted the appropriate application to the Commission, as well as reports of direct ballot stuffing.

¹ Stand: 6:20 a.m., September 14, 2015.

² On Election Day, the “Map of violations” from “Golos” (as of 09:00 a.m., September 14) received 858 messages (for the whole campaign period: 1,756 messages), a number which keeps growing as data on the vote count and tabulation arrives. According to the “Map,” the most problematic elections took place in Kostroma Region (228 messages), followed by Samara (88 messages), Republic of Tatarstan (55), Voronezh (43), and Chelyabinsk (40). Full statistics on recorded violations in the region are available at <http://www.kartanarusheniy.org/2015-09-13/stat/892581309>.

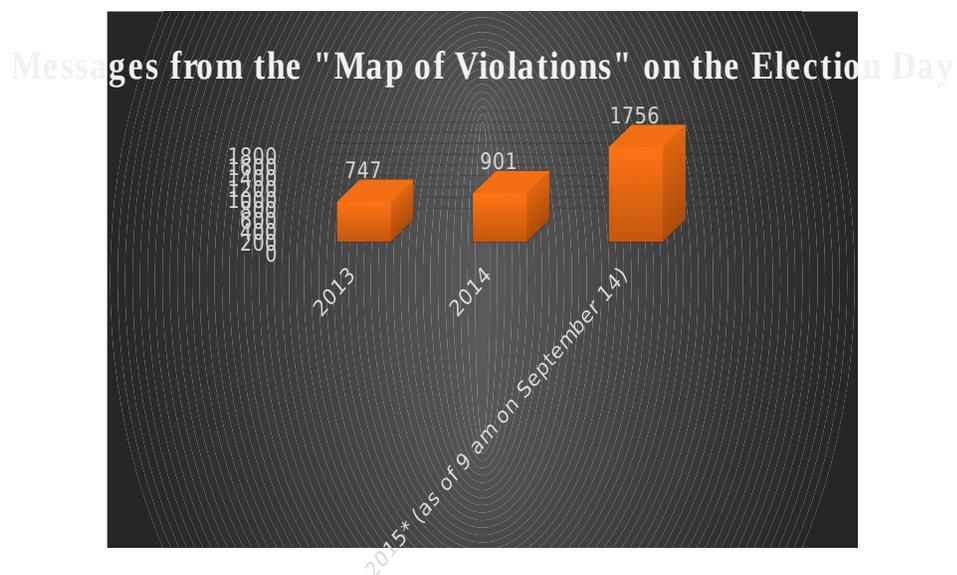
To conceal these and other violations, in many cases chairpersons of election commissions resorted to **the removal of observers, the media, and even members of the commissions** at the vote counting stage. The Tatarstan and Kostroma regions reported intermissions in vote counting, the removal of observers under false pretenses, and restrictions of their right to monitor the vote count.

Throughout the day, we also recorded attempts of **vote buying** (Tatarstan, Voronezh, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Leningrad, Nizhny Novgorod, Oryol, Chelyabinsk Region, and others.).

Mass voting with absentee ballots was observed in the Irkutsk and Kostroma regions. In Tatarstan and the Ryazan region there were frequent recorded cases of administrative pressure exerted on voters.

Most regions sent reports of **illegal campaigning**, which was particularly prominent in the Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, and Chelyabinsk regions.

That these trends have intensified over the past 3 years is apparent in the increase in messages in the “Map of violations.”



Election monitoring of Election Day on September 13, 2015, by “Golos”—both long-term observation (over the course of the whole election campaign) and the short-term observation (the progress of the voting day)—allows us to make the following recommendations:

To the State Duma:

- Ensure the stability of electoral law and protect it from manipulations in favor of the ruling party and individual subjects of the political process. Introduce changes to electoral law primarily in the interests of the voters.

- Create the necessary conditions for public election observation; in particular, legislate the observation of elections by public associations.
- Rule out participation of executive branch officials and institutions in the formation of election commissions.
- Increase the fine amount for administrative offenses related to electoral law violations and deprive perpetrators of these offenses the right to work in election commissions at all levels for 5 years.
- Cancel signature collecting by municipal deputies and heads of municipalities in the elections of regional governors, or reduce their number to 1-3% to ensure competitiveness.
- Cancel signature collecting for the elections of deputies of the legislative and representative bodies of regional and local authorities, or bring back electoral deposit.
- Oblige the heads of regions and municipalities who are candidates to go on vacation for the period of the election campaign.
- Increase, and enforce with vigor, penalties for abusing official advantages during the elections.
- Eliminate the possibility of using for campaign purposes public events organized by budget organizations and/or with the participation of officials on duty.
- Change Russian electoral law to close the loophole permitting the financing of election funds from companies with foreign ownership or companies belonging to the Russian Federation, subjects of the Federation, or municipalities.

To the Electoral Commissions:

- Ensure that the decision making process is completely independent, collegial, open, and transparent, as required by current electoral law.
- Do not carry out recommendations and informal orders that do not comply with the current electoral law
- Ensure greater protection of commission members in case of persecution for refusing to commit illegal actions.
- Eliminate any element of arbitrariness and selectivity when making decisions.
- Ensure the equality of all candidates and parties during nomination, registration, and the collection and verification of signatures, as well as during pre-election campaigning and all other electoral activities.
- Create an environment in which candidates and parties enjoy equal access to the media.
- Develop a set of measures to detect and prevent indirect campaigning carried out under the pretense of informing the public about a candidate's job performance.
- Tighten control over campaigning activities financed and organized outside the scope of election funds, such as by using administrative resources and unequal access to the media.
- When publishing data about institutional donors, disclose information about the real owners of the donating companies, including the owners of joint stock companies.

- When publishing information on the financing sources of election funds, disclose the tax number of the legal person.

To Candidates and Political Parties:

- Adhere in election campaigns only to the principles and methods of fair competition.
- Do not resort to using administrative resources.

To the Media:

- Ensure equal opportunity for all candidates and parties to access print space, air time, and network resources.
- Ensure objectivity and equality of candidates and parties in media election coverage.
- Refrain from publishing negative custom campaign materials.

To the Judicial Branch and Law Enforcement Agencies:

- Take measures to uncover and punish the instigators and organizers of crimes committed by election commission members and related to voting and election rigging.
- More conscientiously investigate violations and crimes based on clear evidence and testimony equality.
- Curb offenses related to taking advantage of official positions during the elections.
- Tighten control over campaign activities carried out in addition to the election fund, using administrative resources and unequal access to the media.
- Curb actions impeding lawful campaign activities of candidates and electoral associations.
- Do not follow politically motivated instructions.