

**Pre-electoral campaigning and administrative mobilisation
of the voters for the elections on the single voting day of 13th September
2020**

The elections of 13th September 2020 are the first major Russian elections in the “age of the Coronavirus”. This fact has left a serious mark on the conduct of the agitation campaigns, although it did not change the Russian electoral system at its core.

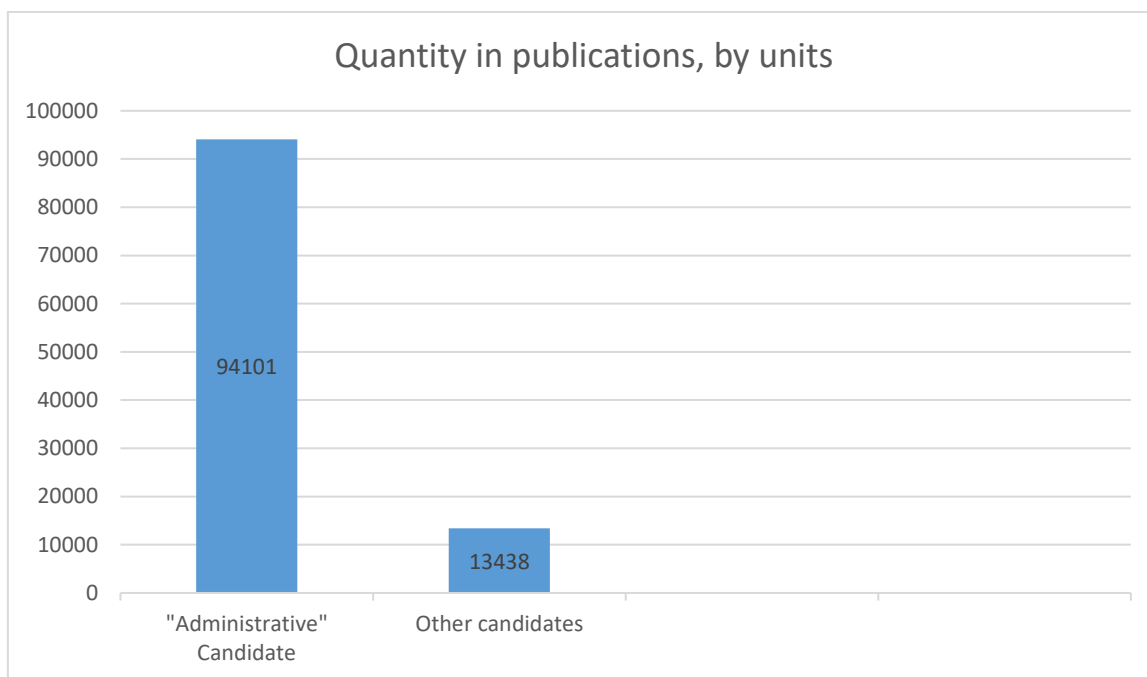
This is the fourth report within the framework of the “Golos” program related to the long-term observation of the 13th September 2020 elections. It is dedicated to the course of the agitation campaign. In total, 13th September is to see 9,071 campaigns. These include the early elections to the state Duma in four districts (which count as a single campaign), the election of 18 heads of regions, 11 regional parliaments, and 22 city councils in administrative centres. More than 78,000 deputy mandates and elected positions are to be disputed.

The main particularities of the electoral campaigns include the unequal conditions for the conduct of the campaigns by the candidates, pressure put on opposition candidates and voters, as well as the system of state propaganda on the mainstream mass media that has come into being and that in recent years saw active spread into social networks and the internet in general. The regional authorities and the spin-doctors have also learned to use social networks in such a way that they only accentuate the inequality between the candidates. Nevertheless, the internet in general has considerably more room for different opinions than the mainstream mass media.

In Russia, two parallel electoral systems, two worlds, came into being – one for those who in the elections are supported by the authorities, and another for everyone else. This is facilitated by the state propaganda, which reigns supreme in the mainstream mass media and which has managed completely to destroy the pluralism of opinion.

The “Golos” movement, with the help of “SCAN-Interfax”, has conducted a monitoring of the publications mentioning the candidates to gubernatorial positions in the mainstream mass media outlets of the respective regions.

The monitoring has shown that number of summary mentions of “administrative” candidates in their respective regional mainstream mass media outlets is seven times greater than the number of times all the remaining election candidates put together are mentioned (Figure 1).



The leaders in inequality are the Leningrad District, the Krasnodar Region, and the Smolensk, Penza, Kostroma, Kaluga, and Rostov Districts (especially distinguished in this regard was the candidate to the gubernatorial position in the Leningrad District named Drozdenko, who overtook all his competitors 23 times in the number of publications).

In order to create such an advantage, the state controlled mainstream mass media outlets as well as the “administrative candidates” themselves by using loopholes in the electoral laws. The lack of the requirement for candidates to go on leave for the entire period of participation in elections allows them to conduct a full-scale agitation campaign under the guise of fulfilling a Governor’s duties.

One of the widespread forms of infringing on the electoral rights of the citizens has become the displaying of campaign materials within the official accounts of the government bodies, local authority institutions, and educational, cultural, and healthcare establishments and organisations.

The possibility to freely receive and spread information during the period of the electoral campaign is one of the key conditions for an actual political discussion, which is the only way to facilitate real conscious choice by the voters.

At the same time, the 2020 elections saw a large number of reports indicating hindrances in the conduct of electoral campaigning. The first and foremost issue in these reports relates to widespread occurrences of destruction and theft of campaign materials. These offences often involve staff from government and municipal bodies, company management, and local authority organisations.

In addition, a portion of the candidates have faced the illegal refusal of businesses to produce or distribute their campaign materials. Part of the hostile measures taken within campaigns relate to the use of violence or threats against candidates, their campaign office staff, or their supporters. Such reports have come from the Vladimir, Lipetsk, and Novosibirsk Districts. In some cases, as in the Chuvash Republic and the Kostroma, Novosibirsk, and Ryazan Districts, the hostile measures against

campaigns are taking place with the use of law enforcement officers, who instead of defending the electoral rights of citizens, are actively participating in their violation.

In terms of media space, the total domination of the candidates and parties enjoying the support of the acting authorities could be partially counterbalanced by direct contact with voters in street gatherings and meetings. Such meetings, taking place in periods of electoral campaigning or prior to their start, must be seen as an inseparable part of the pre-electoral discussion, without which it is impossible to conduct fair elections.

The Russian judicial system is in line with these standards, thus indicating support for the special role of the freedom of assembly in the expression of the will of the voters. **The Russian Constitutional Court indicates that the freedom of assembly not only constitutes a form of peaceful and constructive public dialogue but is also an important display of the social and political freedom of individuality. It is part of the system of democratic institutions, facilitating the expression and formation of the will and interests of the citizens of the Russian Federation.**

Nevertheless, when the vote on the amendment to the Constitution was taking place, restriction of the freedom of assembly was widely used by the authorities to hinder the free expression of the citizens' will.

The majority of the sanitary-epidemiological restrictions introduced in the spring have already been removed: in almost the whole territory of the country, we see that cafés, restaurants, museums, libraries, commercial centres, and public transport are working; people are going to work, and mass sport events are taking place. Nevertheless, restrictions are still in force for open-air events such as political gatherings, meetings with voters, and campaign picketing.

As a result, candidates and parties in many regions have reported the impossibility of conducting a normal campaign in such conditions. The situation is even further complicated by attempts of the “administrative” candidates to bypass these restrictions and create even more advantages for themselves when running their campaigns.

The “fight against the epidemic” has in reality become an instrument of restricting voters' rights. Such restrictions by themselves put into jeopardy the possibility of free expression of the citizens' will, while the removal of restrictions for the work of venues of public mass gatherings (commercial centres, restaurants, museums, etc.) shows the baselessness of the prohibition of political gatherings, picketing, and meetings with voters, especially when such prohibitions are not applied to candidates supported by the authorities.

No less important is the fact that the difficult epidemiological situation has been used as an excuse by the system of electoral commissions to introduce “additional forms” of voting to the present elections, including the expansion of the single voting day to three days by example of the constitutional plebiscite. This leads to a lowering of the guarantees of electoral rights, a decrease in the public control of the election process, and the growth of possibilities for vote falsification and the forcing of citizens to vote for a particular candidate, all of which are obvious in this situation.

This year's reports on the bribing of voters have arrived from several regions, including the Irkutsk, Lipetsk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Novosibirsk, and Ryazan Districts. The Lipetsk and Nizhniy Novgorod

Districts saw the bribing taking place under cover of charitable actions, while in the Ryazan District, the “New People” party compels its observers to vote for no other party than itself. Party officials have made clear that otherwise the observers will not be paid for their work.

The beginning of the early vote saw the first reports on forced voting. In Krasnodar, the employees of the Territorial Public Local Authority are forced to compile voters’ lists; they are additionally told that employees of the Territorial Public Local Authority can independently write statements on behalf of inhabitants requesting the early vote. In the Novosibirsk District, Governor Andrei Travnikov has been threatening the inhabitants of one of the municipalities with serious problems upon the distribution of financing. In the Irkutsk and Nizhniy Novgorod Districts, the staff of the budgetary institutions are forced to take part in the early vote.

Electoral campaigning is sufficiently strictly regulated by Russian electoral law. Nevertheless, many regions saw a rise in the use of various types of dirty methods.

Several candidates have made an effort to play on nationalist feelings, using hate speech and making attempts to spread ethnic discord. For instance, campaign materials displayed in Ryazan belonging to the “For Truth” party of Zakhar (Evgeny) Prilepin contain the obviously nationalistic slogan “We will defend the Russians!” (*Translator’s note: the word used for “Russians” in the slogan and the original text denotes “ethnic Russians” as opposed to “inhabitants or citizens of Russia”, for which the Russian language has a different word*). Another incident that ought to be mentioned took place in Ulyanovsk, where the head of the Department for the Development of the Ulyanovsk Drama Theatre, Anna Marques Cavaleiro, is running for a seat in the Ulyanovsk City Douma in a single-mandate district under the colours of the “Against All” movement. The likeness of the mixed-race candidate with Afro-Portuguese roots displayed on the campaign materials is darkened with black paint. The mainstream media outlets write that the posters bearing her likeness are displayed all over the city. The slogan on the banners state: “We are all “Negroes”! Vote against all!”



(Translator’s note: In the figure displaying the poster, the text reads: “VOTE AGAINST ALL! / WE ARE NOT SLAVES! / Anna Marques Cavaleiro / Head of the Department for the Development of the Ulyanovsk Drama Theatre / Born in Ulyanovsk / Ulyanovsk, Elections to the City Duma, 13th September 2020.” The writing on the blackboard in the picture reads: “Zoom lessons online”).

Problems such as illegal campaigning were reported by both candidates and voters from the Chuvash Republic, the Krasnodar Region, and the Kurgan, Lipetsk, and Ryazan Districts. These include examples of the production and distribution of campaign materials that have not been paid from the electoral funds. Such reports came from the Chuvash Republic and the Bryansk, Lipetsk, and Orel Districts.

There exists a marked contrast between the attitude of the government and local authority bodies and institutions toward candidates who are supported by the various levels administration, and those who do not enjoy such support. Electoral advantages that are unstipulated by the law or even prohibited by it are used to favour certain candidates via the participation of civil servants and staff of municipalities in campaign events of such candidates, participation in meetings with voters, use of budgetary resources for support of particular candidates, and other illicit methods.

A full detailed report in the Russian language can be found at https://www.golosinfo.org/articles/144682?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=-dva-parallelnyh-mira--nasha-izbiratel