



Analytical Report № 6.

Final Stage of Election Campaign

Local Elections on September 13, 2015 Russian Federation

The long-term election observation program by the Interregional Public Foundation for Civil Society Development “Golos-Ural”¹ and the movement “Golos” (hereinafter “Golos”) in 2015 includes random monitoring of regional and municipal election campaigns for compliance with the principles and standards of free and equal democratic elections. “Golos” is conducting a long-term observation of the elections in 21 regions.² “Golos” also analyses information from other regions, received via the website “Map of Violations” (www.kartanarusheniy.org).

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² Vladimir region (Council of People's Deputies of the city of Vladimir), Voronezh region (Voronezh Regional Duma, Voronezh City Council, and a number of elections of representative bodies of local self-government—hereinafter LSG), Ivanovo region (Ivanovo City Council, and a number of LSG elections), Irkutsk region (governor), Kaliningrad region (governor), Kaluga region (governor, the Legislative Assembly of Kaluga Region, The City Council of Kaluga, and several LSG elections), Krasnodar Territory (governor, the City Duma of Krasnodar, a number of LSG elections), Kostroma region (governor, the Kostroma Regional Duma, the Duma of the city of Kostroma, and a number of LSG elections), Kurgan region (Kurgan Regional Duma), Leningrad region (governor), Lipetsk region (Lipetsk City Council of Deputies, as well as a number of LSG elections), the Republic of Mari El (Head of the Republic), Nizhny Novgorod region (City Duma of Nizhny Novgorod), Novosibirsk region (the Legislative Assembly of the Novosibirsk region, the Board of Deputies of the city of Novosibirsk), Orel region (Orel City Council of People's Deputies), Rostov region (governor, Rostov-on-Don City Council, and a number of LSG elections), Ryazan region (Ryazan Regional Duma), Samara region (elections of representative bodies of inner city areas of Samara), Republic of Tatarstan (President, Kazan City Council, and a number of LSG elections), Tomsk region (Duma of Tomsk), Chelyabinsk region (Chelyabinsk Region Legislative Assembly).

Thus, “Golos” experts and long-term observers focus on:

General Conclusion

This report finds that a number of election commissions organizing the elections are arbitrary and biased when it comes to governing the campaign activities of election participants. The election commissions show favor and indulgence towards the administrative ruling party candidates, and prejudice towards the opposition representatives.

Use of administrative resources has long been an integral part of the Russian election process. Those endowed with administrative authority use their official positions to benefit some candidates and parties, while putting pressure on the others.

There are numerous instances of officials on duty campaigning in support of certain candidates and parties, and of ceremonial activities performed by administrative candidates under the pretext of executing their professional duties, as well as instances of using budget funds and other public resources for election campaigning purposes, and putting pressure on the administratively dependent voters.

In the case of the abuse of power resources, we are talking about politically motivated and biased actions of the judicial and law enforcement system against certain candidates, even against entire electoral associations (party members, staff election headquarters, etc.). Unfortunately, there were reports of such incidents occurring during the current elections.

With the approach of Election Day, there is predictably an increase in cases of hindrance of lawful election campaigning activities of certain candidates and parties. As a rule, the targets are opposition parties and candidates who are perceived to be serious competitors to the authorities. Unfortunately, in these situations the police is often sluggish or simply does nothing, despite the fact that these incidents are often severe and even criminal in nature, such as threats made on the lives and wellbeing of campaign participants and employees of election headquarters.

Also reported are cases of obstruction of public campaign events—actions which are instigated by the authorities, occur in agreement with them, and with the assistance of state and municipal institutions and enterprises.

There were reported offenses related to the lack of output data on the campaign materials, improper placement of election campaign information, involvement of children in election campaigning, and vote buying. As a rule, a wide variety of election participants are involved in electoral law violations of this kind.

In the campaign stage of the elections, there are markedly more cases of hidden campaigning and voter recruitment: under the guise of informing the public about the candidates' professional

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- 10 out of 21 elections of heads of subjects of the federation;
 - 8 out of 11 elections of representative bodies of subjects of the federation;
 - 14 elections of representative bodies of the 25 regional capitals (including Samara and Makhachkala).

performances, administrative candidates engage in pre-election campaigning. There are also instances of negative campaigning when distributed materials have a clearly negative slant.

Election Commissions

After the registration stage is complete, there is a tendency to reduce the number of election participants. Registered parties and candidates turn to the courts to challenge the registration of their competitors.

In some regions, Election Commissions are using a new tactic: they register parties and candidates who have committed obvious violations of the electoral process, then shift the responsibility for their withdrawal to the competitors and the courts.

For example, in the Vladimir region two candidates were withdrawn from the lists of both the Communist Party and the “Fair Russia” party in the election of candidates for deputies of the Council of People’s Deputies of the City of Vladimir. In the Kaluga region, candidates from the Communist Party Alexei Rudenko and Vladimir Kim were withdrawn from the certified regional list of candidates after evidence surfaced that they concealed information on their criminal records. In the Ivanovo region, 16 candidates were found to have criminal records. Their registrations were denied because they omitted that information. In total, in the Ivanovo region, after registration in the local elections, 26 candidates withdrew based on personal decisions and one was withdrawn by the electoral association.

The obvious trend of the election campaigns of recent years is to “fight crime penetration” into the government. Election commissions, as well as the media in their coverage of the current elections, focus on identifying candidates with previous convictions. Moreover, the label of “criminal” is applied to any candidate who had even the smallest run-in with the law, including those whose criminal records have long since been canceled or withdrawn.

Focusing on troubles with the law becomes one of the methods of unscrupulous political crusading and leads to media smear campaigns that negatively shape the attitude of voters not only toward individual candidates and parties, but also the current elections as a whole, and the institution of elections in general.

A typical example is a report from the Ivanovo region released by the information resource “Ivanovonews” under the characteristic title “Former Thieves Want to Become Deputies. EXCLUSIVE.” The article provides a list of convicted candidates nominated to run in the elections in the Ivanovo region. The “leader” of this “hit parade” is the Liberal Democratic Party (with 15 nominated candidates), “United Russia” is in second place (13 candidates), and the Communist Party in third (10 candidates), with “Fair Russia” bringing up the rear (5 candidates).

Election commissions rarely acknowledge the violation of electoral law by current governors and candidates supported by the “United Russia” party, while any suspicion of carrying out illegal campaigning on the part of their opponents and other controversial cases tend to lead to the opposite and unambiguous decisions.

Information Campaign

Election commissions use state and municipal media to inform voters about election campaigns. In some regions, election commissions are limited in their information and organizational resources, which negatively affects the quality of the information they present to voters.

The circulation of state and municipal newspapers and their audience coverage are very small in many regions. For example, the circulation of the newspaper “Ryazan News,” which provides free space for candidates and parties in the elections in the Ryazan region, is only 5,000 copies. In the Kurgan region, the capital city of Kurgan has the lowest media coverage in the region, reaching only 2% of the electorate. The situation is marginally better in the Shadrinsk area: the city of Shadrinsk, the largest district center in the area, has a coverage of 2.5%, and the Ketovsky District, which lies around the regional capital, has a coverage of 3.3%. These numbers vary considerably from region to region (for example, the Mishkinskiy District has 22% coverage). Thus, there is a notable lack of circulation of state and municipal media in most parts of the Kurgan region, with 9 out of 17 districts found to be extremely lacking in coverage.

Administrative Resources to Create Advantages for Preferred Candidates

State and municipal employees take an active part in the campaign activities of administrative candidates from “United Russia.” Public events organized by state or municipal authorities and funded from state budgets are widely used to campaign in favor of certain candidates and parties. Children often participate in these events, which turn into campaign activities.

Examples of such actions come from all the regions. In the Vladimir region, the official website of the regional administration center published a report about a festive event organized by the administration of the Frunze District, focusing on the participation in it of Oleg Kashitsyn, the “United Russia” candidate for deputy of the city council.

Habitual is the markedly increased frequency of informing voters via state and municipal media about “working meetings and visits” of regional leaders, government members, and MPs from “United Russia” who also happen to be candidates running in the current elections.

Each month of the year has “holiday” dates designated for organizing mass public events with a “shade of campaigning.”

Since there are many heads of municipal institutions nominated as candidates, they “naturally” use their subordinates as campaign participants and their “election headquarters” are located in the offices of the very institutions they run. These actions are common for heads of public colleges, school and kindergarten principles, and managers of social services. Administrative candidates place campaign materials in the windows of municipal and state agencies, with the help of local administrations.

There are reports that candidates who head public institutions urge their staff members to mobilize their families and friends to vote for them. Those who live in a different area are urged

to use absentee ballots. Public support for “gubernatorial candidates” comes from members of the Public Chamber and community councils in the region—in particular from members of neighborhood community councils created before the election, and consisting mainly of heads of state and municipal institutions. Before the start of the school year, parent meetings are held in schools and are attended by candidates urging people to vote.

In the Krasnodar region, municipal officials make lists of people who will come to the polls on September 13 to vote for the “United Russia” gubernatorial candidate Veniamin Kondratyev.

A common practice during the election is to conduct closed polls on the popularity of certain candidates and parties by request of regional administrations, but there is no public data on the results of such poll and the sources of their funding.

Indirect Campaigning

Some regions employ the well-known practice of “social advertising” on behalf of municipal and regional authorities, using public budget money and slogans, images, and symbols similar to those used by the candidates from “United Russia.”

Usually, in the pre-election period, the parties “remember” their party projects and actively use them for indirect campaigning in favor of their candidates. “United Russia” often uses budgetary resources for these purposes. For example, according to a report from the Ivanovo region, equipment being used for road repairs in the city of Ivanovo had printed materials containing the name of the party “United Russia,” its logo, and mention of the party project “Safe Roads.”

Another common practice is to “join” the implementation of social projects hyped by local authorities and media, and which are run with the support of regional and municipal administrations. For example, Ryazan region “United Russia” candidate Vladislav Safronov (Election District No. 4) joined the implementation of the volunteer project “No Other People’s Problems,” launched under the auspices of the regional government.

Abuse of Power Resources

Since the start of the active phase of campaigning, there have been frequent reports of illegal activities undertaken by law enforcement agencies against certain candidates, parties, and party supporters, and with the goal of restricting the activities of campaign workers, trustees, and volunteers, as well as the candidates and parties themselves. In such cases, the actions of law enforcement agencies aim to impede the lawful campaign activities of candidates and parties, and are thus obviously politically motivated.

A recent egregious case was the detention of the regional list leader of the “RPR-Parnas” party Ilya Yashin during a meeting with voters in the Kostroma region.

In the Nizhny Novgorod region, unknown people showed up at the house of Kirill Korshunov, a candidate from the Communist Party to the City Duma of Nizhny Novgorod for Electoral District No. 27. The visitors did not present criminal investigation documents, gave him 10

minutes to pack, and drove him away in an unknown direction. As it turned out later, he was taken to a local center for the fight against extremism and, according to Korshunov, forced to sign a document that included a confession of vandalism (on the account of some wall graffiti with indecent remarks against a certain “Panov”). The statement to the police was filed by the “United Russia” candidate V. Panov.

On August 25, the Communist Party candidate for governor of the Irkutsk region, Sergei Levchenko—who is still a member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation—met with law enforcement officials. They talked about the surveillance of campaigners and supporters of the candidate, and the unjustified detention of campaigners and their vehicles.

Obstruction of Campaign Activities

The closer the finish of the election race, the more there are incidents of obstruction or disruption of campaign events. The victims are mostly opposition candidates and parties.

Obstruction of the Distribution and Placement of Campaign Materials, Their Removal and Destruction. Attacks on Campaigners.

A tense situation is unfolding in the Vladimir region, where attacks continue on campaigners—primarily from the Communist Party and “Fair Russia”—in the elections to the regional center’s Council. On August 19-20, a group of unidentified young people attacked campaigners and candidates of the Communist Party. Campaigners for a number of other candidates suffered similar attacks.

In the Voronezh region, at about 5 p.m. on August 24, in Constituency No. 7 in Voronezh City, there were two attacks on Communist Party campaigners. On August 28, there was an attack on the pickets of the party “Yabloko” in the center of Ivanovo.

There are cases of forceful action taken against candidates. On August 20, in the city of Shuya in the Ivanovo region, a Ford Focus belonging to one of the employees of the “Local Demand” newspaper (“Mestniy Spos”) was intentionally burned. It was parked in the courtyard of the editorial board. The Newspaper’s owner and editor-in-chief Sergei Shestukhin, leader of the local branch of “Fair Russia,” is running as a candidate in the election of the City Council of Shuya.

In Zlatoust, Chelyabinsk region, an ally of the leader of “Fair Russia” Valery Hartung and deputy candidate, Olga Muhametyarova, complained about destruction of campaign posters. Her car was subsequently covered with paint. This was the third incident with the car in the past four months.

Obstacles in the Placement of Campaign Materials

In the Vladimir region, the administration of Vladimir City adopted a resolution on authorized places for electoral campaigning. In District No. 14 there are 7 polling stations and only 2 information stands on which to place campaign information.

In Krasnodar Territory, representatives of the Communist Party reported the destruction of their campaign materials. For example, in some areas of the region someone is purposefully removing candidate Osadchy's posters. In the Irkutsk region, 30 banners promoting the Communist Party leader Sergei Levchenko, who is running for the region's head, were cut off or disappeared in different cities of the region.

In the Vladimir region, Legislative Assembly deputy Vladimir Sipyagin reported that someone is removing announcements of meetings between residents and candidates from the LDPR party. Law enforcement agencies, unfortunately, are not reacting quickly enough to this information.

Chairpersons and members of local governments are also involved in pre-election campaigning; they become participants in the election on the side of administrative candidates or candidates actively sponsoring them. Management companies are also involved in removing competitors' campaign materials. There is information from the Vladimir, Samara, and Chelyabinsk regions about the heads of management companies participating in posting leaflets for candidates of the "United Russia" party, as well about seizures and destruction of campaign materials of the party's competitors. There are even cases of destruction of billboards and bulletin boards at house entrances in order to prevent candidates from placing their campaign materials there.

Obstacles in Conducting Public Campaign Events

Candidates and parties from different regions of the country report difficulties in organizing meetings with voters. This is especially true of smaller communities where there are few suitable premises for the organization of such meetings. Heads of the agencies who run such premises are forced to coordinate their actions with the "good will" of the administration heads of districts and settlements.

There are reports of rowdy and even criminal cases of obstruction of campaigning activities.

For example, there is information on obstacles in the organization of meetings with voters in the Ivanovo region. In the Kurgan region, the website of the Regional Election Commission publishes information on providing premises to registered candidates for deputies of the Kurgan Regional Duma and to electoral associations with registered lists of candidates. Based on data from the website, priority in the provision of premises is very obviously being given to "United Russia" and its candidates. Out of the 140 published notifications, 135 are about providing free premises to "United Russia" candidates. The 5 other cases pertain to two candidates from the "Fair Russia" party. Other registered associations and candidates were unable to use the state and municipal facilities to stage public campaign events.

In the Kaluga region, according to reports from the regional branch of "Fair Russia," the administration of urban settlements Sukhinichi (headed by Gregory Kharlamov) and Maloyaroslavets (headed by Andrei Golikov) denied the local branch of "Fair Russia" the right to organize pickets, although event notices had been filed in a timely manner. The administration of Cheboksary (Chuvashia Republic) denied the regional branch of "Fair Russia" the right to

picket, citing the reason that they received a simultaneous notice from “United Russia” to hold pickets at a similar time.

Other Campaign Violations

Involving Minors in Campaigns, Placement of Campaign Materials on Monuments

According to paragraph 6 of Article 48 of Federal Law №67-FZ, it is prohibited to involve in campaigning persons under 18 years of age on Election Day, including the use images of and statements by such persons in campaign materials. There is evidence, however, that some candidates violate this ban. For example, in the Kaluga region, during a family festival in Balabanovo, a candidate and acting deputy of the local city council, Artem Tarutin, appeared in a yellow shirt and with a flag with the inscription “Fair Russia.” The same yellow T-shirts were distributed at the event to 13-14 year-old boys and girls.

According to paragraph 10 of Article 54 of Federal Law №67-FZ (“On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights...”), “it is prohibited to post (glue, place) printed campaign materials on monuments, obelisks, buildings, structures, and premises of historical, cultural, or architectural value.” Meanwhile, in Tatarstan campaign posters of gubernatorial candidate Rustam Minnikhanov were placed in the windows and doorways of monuments.

Absence of Required Information in Campaign Materials

Various parties and candidates use the placement of illegal campaign materials not financed from election funds. In the Chelyabinsk region, the LDPR and the Communist Party did precisely that: during the election campaign, they continued to post the usual banners with the logos of their parties. These banners permanently hang in many regions of the country as political advertisements. Because the banners were not financed from the election funds of regional party branches and were not presented to the election commission before being posted, the Election Commission of the area decided to establish a deadline for payment for the banners from the electoral funds. If these conditions are not fulfilled, they intend to contact law enforcement agencies to address these violations.

Also recorded are offenses related to the lack of output data on campaign products and to the unlawful placement of pre-election campaign materials.

In the Ryazan region, the party “RPR-Parnassus” sent to the regional election commission five complaints pointing to numerous TV ads featuring candidates from “United Russia” and featuring the party’s banners and flags. However, none of these TV ads are officially recognized as campaign material by the election commission.

In the Krasnodar region, the Krasnodar city election commission refused to recognize as campaign material the booklet “1 + 10” from the party “United Russia” for the same reason: the material allegedly does not contain any information about the current election campaign. In addition, the booklet is allegedly intended only for employees of the local executive committee

of “United Russia.” According to the Commission, this is confirmed by the relevant text, and the booklet should not be freely distributed, even though the facts suggest otherwise.

In the Kurgan region, the regional Election Commission refused to recognize as campaign material the newspaper “Fair Russia,” despite the fact that it is distributed during the election campaign (but, according to relevant documents, published before the start of the campaign period).

Similarly, in the Ryazan region, three issues of a newspaper published with the symbols of the “Fair Russia” party and without the requisite output data were deemed to be illegal campaign materials. The fourth edition of the newspaper came out in the same style, but with all the necessary references to financing from the election fund.

Vote Buying

There are reports of vote buying from the Nizhny Novgorod region. All reports are related to the old scheme used by candidates from “United Russia.” In the elections of deputies of the City Duma of Nizhny Novgorod, numerous campaigners are hired to vote for the candidate from the “United Russia” candidate for 500 to 2,500 rubles per vote. The text of the agreement they sign does not contain obvious signs of incitement to illegal actions. The problem, however, is that such contracts are numerous, there is no real campaigning involved, and the contracts are in fact non-legally binding fictitious.

Already, there are tens of thousands of signed contracts (with campaigners and observers), and in the run-up to Election Day their number is likely to increase.

Election Campaign in the Media

In almost all monitored regions, preferred media coverage is awarded to pro-government candidates and parties. There are cases of preferential access to certain media by some parties and candidates, and cases of violations of media publishing in the campaign period.

In the Ivanovo region, observers noted that regional TV channels (such as “Ivteleradio” and “Bars”) are staying away from the coverage of municipal elections in their news releases. “Ivteleradio” never announced the possibility of hosting broadcasts of election campaigning for a commercial fee. At the same time, there is a decrease in indirect TV campaigning for particular candidates under the guise of informing about their performances, which was observed in large numbers in the elections of deputies of the regional Duma in 2013 and the election of regional governors in 2014.

There is also little information on the current election in the print media; print media mostly publish the commercial campaign materials of candidates and parties.

The most comprehensive and interesting coverage of elections is found in the electronic media, but these, as a rule, do not publish campaign materials.

A common practice is the appearance of campaign materials in advertising publications, as well as in publications that did not apply for election coverage to the electoral commission organizing the elections.

In the Ivanovo region, the advertising newspaper “1000 Houses” is distributed through a regional center for free through mailboxes; its circulation is 30,000 copies. However, it is distributed with a four-page campaign material insert in support of the list of “United Russia” candidates in the elections to the Ivanovo city council. During the period of the election campaign, the publication turned from advertising into analytical coverage, which provides expert opinions on local politics with a clear skew in favor of the “party in power.”

Other parties and candidates also enjoy “administrative” benefits. For example, the newspaper “Ivanovo Kupets” regularly publishes campaign materials against “United Russia.” The founder of the newspaper and its deputy editor is Dmitry Esaulov, who is also registered as a candidate for deputy of the Ivanovo City Council on the list of the party “Fair Russia.” It is noteworthy that the newspaper “Ivanovo Kupets” is on the list of media that have indicated their willingness to provide print space for election campaigning on a commercial basis.

The movement “Golos” continues to watch with interest the increased media activity of the Acting Governor of the Irkutsk Region Sergey Eroschenko. During the week of August 17-22, Irkutsk TV channels and the state newspaper “Oblastnaya” published no less than 23 reports on the activities of the Acting Governor. During the same period, none of the other candidates for governor appeared in these state-run media.

Many media in Irkutsk are using conflicting information about the start of criminal proceedings against the son of gubernatorial candidate from the Communist Party Sergei Levchenko.

In the Krasnodar Krai, absolute priority in state media coverage is given to the current interim governor. In the period from August 17 to 22, the Acting Governor Vladimir Kondratyev was mentioned in television news reports by “Kuban-24” TV channel at least 7 times, while other candidates for governor were not mentioned at all.

In the Samara region, because of administrative arbitrariness, state media and “pro-governor bloggers” regularly post negative material about the governor’s opponents. The gist of the material is simple: the candidates of all parties except “United Russia” and “the governor’s team” are “bad guys.” The materials condemn the membership of other candidates in certain social groups, their personality, and the “unworthy” qualities of their parties.

In the Kostroma region, channel “TV-21” aired a comment by Larissa Zolotova—a “United Russia” candidate for deputy of the Municipal Duma of the sixth convocation of the city of Buy—without specifying whether the plug was financed from the candidate’s election fund.

On August 26, the newspaper “Kuzbass,” run by the administration of the Kemerovo region, published a campaign article about Aman Tuleyev, the “United Russia” candidate for governor

of the Kemerovo region. There is no indication that the publication was paid for from the electoral fund of the candidate.

In the Kostroma region, the channel “Russia” ran a story which reported on the activities of the candidate for governor Sitnikov, who is referred to as “the head of the Kostroma region” (he is the acting governor of the region). The story contains signs of campaigning and was not paid for from the election fund of the candidate.

Out of all the cases of negative campaigning, or so-called “black PR,” involving local and regional media, the most noteworthy is a massive attack on the reputation of the party “Fair Russia” in the Chelyabinsk region. According to representatives of “Fair Russia,” negative materials against the party are regularly broadcast by the TV channel “South Ural,” whose director Peter Vasilev is the candidate from “United Russia.” In particular, according to the complaint, the story titled “Political Battles in the Chelyabinsk Region,” which was included in the Sunday news edition, contained illegal election materials, lies, and slander.

In Korkino city, activists of the party “Fair Russia” detained and handed over to the police three distributors of “black” election papers: a four-lane bulletin “Fair newspaper” which criticizes the regional party leader.

Recommendations:

To the State Duma of the Russian Federation:

- Increase penalties for the misuse of administrative resources and services in the elections, and ensure that such penalties cannot be appealed or evaded.
- Oblige the heads of regions and municipalities who are candidates in the elections to go on vacation for the period of the election campaign.
- Completely eliminate any possibility of use public events financed from the budget and/or with the participation of officials for pre-election campaigning.

To electoral commissions:

- Ensure the equality of all candidates and parties during election campaigns.
- Eliminate any element of arbitrariness and selectivity when making decisions.
- Provide a decision-making process that is fully independent, collegial, open, and transparent, as required by current electoral law.

To candidates and political parties:

- Adhere exclusively to the principles and methods of fair competition in election campaigning.

- Do not resort to using administrative resources.

To law enforcement and judicial authorities:

- Curb offenses in the elections pertaining to the abuse of official positions.
- Tighten control over propaganda activities carried out over and beyond the election funds, using administrative resources and unequal access to the media.
- Curb various actions impeding the lawful campaign activities of candidates and electoral associations.
- Be independent and do not carry out politically motivated instructions.

The expert group that worked on the report: Vitaly Kovin, Denis Shadrin, Vitaly Averin