



The Movement for the Defense of Voters' Rights
"Golos"
golosinfo.org

Moscow, March 19, 2018

Preliminary statement
based on the results of election
observation for the March 18, 2018
presidential elections in the Russian
Federation

The movement "Golos" carried out long- and short-term observation at all stages of the election campaign during the 2018 presidential race in the Russian Federation.

On election day, the "United Call Center Hotline" received more than six thousand calls. The "Map of Violations" crowdsourcing service received three thousand messages during the entire campaign, including two thousand on Election Day.

In the preliminary assessment of the presidential elections, "Golos" acknowledges the definite strong result of the winning candidate but regretfully declares that the movement does not recognize these elections as truly fair, i.e. fully consistent with the Constitution, the laws of the Russian Federation, and international election standards because the election results were achieved in an unfree, unequal, and uncompetitive election campaign. This fact does not allow "Golos," therefore, to assert that the will of the voters was expressed as the result of a free election campaign.

Recorded cases of fraud and violations regarding election procedures, including during ballot counting, require additional verification and detailed analysis of videotapes from the polling stations, which the movement "Golos" began on March 19.

Specific examples illustrating the findings by "Golos" can be found in the reports and statements of the movement (<https://www.golosinfo.org/ru/zayavleniya>), in the "Election Day Chronicle" on the movement's website (<https://www.golosinfo.org/ru/articles/142551#/>), as well as in the messages on the "Map of Violations."

Characteristics of the Election Campaign Before Election Day

- The elections of the president of the Russian Federation in 2018 took place in a limited-competition environment. In many ways, this is due to the existing restrictions on passive electoral citizen rights and to the nature of media reporting on the elections.
- The artificial mobilization of an administratively-dependent electorate using various technologies came as the result of the lack of competition in the presidential race and as a reaction to the election boycott campaign (promoted by Alexei Navalny). Another special feature of the campaign was the widespread involvement of underage citizens, both in the mobilization of voters and in direct political campaigning.
- At the same time, the movement would like to stress the positive role of election commissions, which significantly increased the amount of information provided to citizens about opportunities to participate in the elections.
- Coverage by the mass media was characterized by the manipulative and tendentious nature of information on candidates, in strong part because the media is to some degree controlled by the state. Such a situation prevents citizens from obtaining objective and reliable information about candidates. The incumbent President Vladimir Putin's election campaign activities had a significant influence on the voters' will due to his official title and the widespread coverage by the media.
- In comparison with previous presidential elections, the election commission system was much more open. In general, interaction with the observer community has improved, including on the election day.
- The CEC of Russia created a more convenient voting system for the voters "at the current location," in a polling station other than the place of residence which, however, did not eliminate the possibility of administrative abuse.
- On the eve of Election Day, the state increased pressure on civil activists and independent observers. This pressure manifested itself in attempts to obstruct the activities of independent observers during formation of a call center, as well as in the use of political surveillance and "black PR" against them. Thanks to the intervention of the Chairman of the CEC of Russia on the eve of Election Day, pressure on the movement "Golos" was minimized.
- There were many cases of pressure on voters expressing the wish to realize the right not to participate in the vote.

Preliminary Observation Results on Election Day

The new voting procedure “at the current location” was used for executing **compulsion to vote**: there were records of special voter lists, **organized voter transfers, and activities to monitor voters’ participation in the voting process**. Many reports came from polling stations located on or near the grounds of student dormitories, colleges, and large enterprises. **Voter “migration” within districts significantly exceeded voter “migration” between districts** (For more information, see the express analysis: www.golosinfo.org/en/articles/142556). In total, about 5.7 million people applied for voting “at the current location.” The number of cases of “migration” between districts seems to be just over 1 million voters, and the “migration” within districts is estimated at more than 4.5 million. **In total, almost 30% of the total number of “migrants” were attached to a limited number of 4,821 (out of approx. 96.000) polling stations.**

In preparation for Election Day, about 2 million records were removed by the election commissions from the voters’ lists, including “voter doubles” (one person counted twice) and so-called “dead souls” (fictional or dead voters). In some regions, because of these activities, real voters were also removed from the lists. In most regions, the number of voters increased significantly from the beginning of Election Day to the end of voting: e.g. a 2.1% increase in North Ossetia – Alania and a 3.1% increase in the Moscow region and in St. Petersburg. In sum, **the number of voters on the voters’ list increased on Election Day by almost 1.5 million.**

The following cases were observed: 1) the “books” of voters’ lists that had applied for voting “at the current location” were not bound, 2) there were illegal notices in the voters’ lists, 3) on March 18, precinct election commissions began to grant voting rights to persons with temporary registration, as well as to persons who were absent from supplementary voters’ lists, without legal grounds for doing so.

“Golos” positively evaluates the **decrease in voting outside the voting premises** (the so-called “home vote”) compared to cases in previous presidential elections, from 8.2% down to 6.6%. Nevertheless, observers noted on Election Day cases in which the election commissions came to voters who did not submit applications for “home vote” and cases of voters who submitted such applications but were not visited by precinct commissions.

On the eve of Election Day, observers in some regions found that in printed versions of the precinct election commission workbooks, there was information on banning photos and video capture by members of the commission with advisory vote. As a positive development, the CEC of Russia promptly reacted to the identified problem

and issued explanations. **Reports of non-admission of observers and members of the commissions with advisory vote** (sent by parties and candidates) came from Moscow city, Krasnodar and Khabarovsk regions; Bashkortostan; Dagestan; Karachaevo-Cherkessia; Kemerovo, and Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow regions.

Observers noted problems with the organization of video broadcasts from precinct election commissions (PEC). Specific PEC names with installed cameras were not published in advance. Observers also report numerous facts of bad positioning of video cameras, which did not allow the observers to realistically follow what was happening in the polling stations (e.g. poorly-visible ballot boxes). In some cases, members of election commissions deliberately tried to decrease the chances for video observation, obstructing the camera view by foreign objects, including during the ballot counting.

There were reports from different regions about **ballot box stuffing** (some of them recorded on video), and about possible **voter impersonation**.

“Golos” positively assesses the decline in some turnout figures, as compared to the previous presidential elections, which previously caused serious doubts among the observers. At the same time, preliminary results of turnout assessment by video cameras in several regions (Dagestan, Tatarstan, Tyumen region, Chechnya, etc.) show serious discrepancies with the official results.

The proportion of procedure violations in the entire country were noted in less than 5% of the received observers’ questionnaires. Nevertheless, for three procedures and requirements of the law, the overall level of violations was high. Below are the three violations, which exceeded 5%:

1. Restrictions on the movement of observers inside polling stations: 5.7%;
2. Violation of the sequence of stages of ballot counting: 12.0%;
3. Conducting different stages of ballot counting at the same time: 12.2%.