



**Association GOLOS – Domestic Monitoring of Elections
Of the President of Russian Federation
Russian Federation, 4 March 2012**

Preliminary Report

**Moscow
5 March 2012**

INTRODUCTION

The Association GOLOS has conducted a large-scale observation of the elections of the President of the Russia Federation.

GOLOS Association monitored violations during the voting and counting processes through the use of its Map of Electoral Violations hotline, the new SMS-CEC project (which collects PEC protocol data via SMS,) and communication with correspondents about compliance with electoral procedures.

Correspondents of the newspaper Civic Voice worked in 45 Russian cities. The total number of correspondent groups (with the majority of correspondents having worked in pairs) was 1,218. Correspondents visited approximately 6,400 polling stations.

KEY FINDINGS

The election of the President of the Russian Federation (RF) was carried out in an atmosphere of increased social activism. The State Duma elections on 4 December 2011 were followed by a wave of mass protests, wherein citizens expressed their distrust in the results of the election, demanded their repeal, demanded the liberalization of party and electoral legislation, and frequently expressed their negative opinions of the heads of state. At first, the government reacted haphazardly, but radical proposals were ultimately made. These proposals included changes to party registration rules (reducing the required number of signatures from 45,000 to 500) a return to the elections of heads of the Russian Federation subjects, and reforms to the State Duma election system. They also tried to assuage the public with the introduction of web cameras at polling stations on Election Day.

Nonetheless, the electoral campaign preceding Election Day featured all of the usual shortcomings associated with Russian elections: the extensive use of administrative resources in support of the incumbent, as well as massive--and in some cases, illegal--campaigning for the incumbent on behalf of the Russian media. The level of competition in these elections was somewhat higher than in previous elections, though not enough so to qualify it as an adequate reflection of the range of public interests.

As Election Day approached, campaigning for Putin became increasingly aggressive in nature. In some cases, this aggression played out in the form of pressure on independent media outlets and NGOs.

Preparations for Election Day included the coercion of citizens into obtaining absentee voter certificates (AVCs). Another widespread phenomenon was that of requiring employees to vote at their places of employment.

On Election Day, quite a few violations were noted: the number of reported violations is comparable to the number reported on voting day for the Duma elections. It should be noted, that the numbers were reduced for explicit acts of fraud during voting and the number of observers

removed from polling stations. However, there were numerous cases of mass voting through the use of AVCs.

In general, the RF presidential elections can be characterized as normal in the context of the past decade of Russian elections, with an insufficient level of competition, government interference with the electoral process, and some degree of coercion to vote. These elections cannot be classified as free and fair under the definitions provided in the Russian constitution and international electoral standards.

1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Several features have distinguished the electoral campaign for the 2012 election of the President of the Russian Federation from that of the parliamentary elections.

First, whereas United Russia previously served as the object at the center of the mass-media campaign, the focus has been shifted to the government under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. The main candidate deliberately distanced himself from the party, albeit remaining its leader. He presented himself as leader of the nation, and based his campaign on the All-Russian People's Front, which was established last summer.

Second, the campaign was marked by the "struggle for fair elections and liberalization of the political system," which was the government's reaction to the civil protests that followed the parliamentary elections. Toward this end, it was announced that several radical reforms would be introduced for regional party development and elections. Furthermore, the government has undertaken costly efforts to equip almost all polling stations with security cameras. Thus, promises of fair elections and political reform supplemented the traditional campaign methods of extolling the achievements of the current administration and proposing decisions on financial government assistance for various groups of people.

Third, there was a notable decrease in campaigning on the part of local officials: campaign activities were carried out with greater caution, and with more fear of publicity and public scandals. There was no pronounced impact on the campaign of law enforcement agencies.

Nonetheless, the presidential campaign bore the traditional features of a Russian election, such as the use of office and official position by one of the candidates, who led the federal government throughout the campaign and who benefitted enormously from campaigning disguised as news. Thus, statements about striving for fair elections were exclusive to Election Day and the counting process. Still, judging from reports submitted to the Map of Electoral Violations [<http://www.kartanarusheniy.org/>], there was evidence at the local levels of preparations to distort the will of voters, which intensified as Election Day approached.

It should also be noted that approximately one fifth of voters were able to take part in local elections on 4 March. Developments common to Russian elections were displayed throughout the course of the municipal campaigns, such as the illegal failure to register participants in the election and the use of administrative resources.

The hierarchy of electoral commissions, which was formed with the active participation of the executive branch of the government, remained in tact. Odious leaders retained their posts as heads of electoral commissions.

There were continued efforts to pressure and intimidate representatives of independent NGOs and the media.

Throughout the campaign, the majority of all candidates' regional headquarters exhibited minimal activity. Active campaigning was only visible in regions preparing for important local elections in addition to the presidential elections. Much more pronounced were the activities of NGOs in organizing protests fair elections and political reform. The campaign was characterized by the use of many forms of "Black PR," which targeted both non-system opposition members and registered presidential candidates.

The main campaign has been conducted through the central television channels. This is where administrative resources were used to the maximum extent to indirectly campaign for Putin under the guise of covering his professional activities. Despite the fact that the administrative law clearly demarcates the limitations on the use of one's official position for campaigning purposes, all of the official resources and privileges of being the prime minister have been fully utilized: a trip across the country, meetings with labor collectives, speeches on campaign matters and promises, media reports and coverage.

2. LEGAL CONDITIONS

The Russian presidential elections are regulated by the Russian Constitution and the federal laws, "On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right of Citizens of the Russian Federation to Participate in a Referendum," and "On the Elections of the President of the Russian Federation."

The president is elected for a six-year term. Before the constitutional amendment was made, the president was elected for a four-year term. The President of the Russian Federation shall be no younger than 35 years of age and shall have resided permanently in the Russian Federation for no less than the past 10 years. One cannot be elected as president for more than two consecutive terms, though the total number of terms is not limited. One who—in addition to Russian citizenship—maintains foreign citizenship or legal permanent residency in a foreign country is ineligible to be elected RF President.

A candidate's nomination is produced either at a party congress or at a meeting of an action group of voters (in the case of self-nominated candidates). A candidate that is self-nominated or nominated by a party without representation in the Duma, is given approximately one month to collect at least two million signatures in support of his or her candidacy. Requirements imposed on the collection of signatures are quite rigid. The acceptance of signatures effectively depends on the political will of the organizers of the election.

The candidate is obliged to create an electoral fund from which all campaign costs must be paid. Candidates' electoral funds may not exceed 400 million rubles. If a second round is required, 100 million rubles will be added to the total.

If a candidate gains at least half of the votes cast, he or she will be elected during the first round of elections. If a second round is required, two candidates will compete for the greatest number of votes. In this case, the candidate that gains more votes than his rival will be elected.

Under the law, elections are to be organized and conducted by an independent electoral commission. In practice, the electoral commissions are controlled by the administration. The commission system has a hierarchical structure: one Central Election Commission (CEC); 83 Election Commissions of subjects of the Federation (SECs); 2,746 Territorial Election Commissions (TECs), and more than 95,000 Precinct Electoral Commissions (PECs).

3. NOMINATION AND REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES

Political parties have nominated five candidates for the 4 March 2012 elections. Putin, backed by United Russia, was formally nominated on 27 November 2011. His nomination was unofficially announced at the first party convention on 24 September 2011. Zyuganov, backed by the Communist Party, was nominated on 17 December 2011. Mironov, backed by Fair Russia, was nominated on 10 December 2011. Zhirinovskiy, backed by the Liberal Democratic Party, was nominated on 13 December 2011. Yavlinsky, backed by Yabloko, was nominated on 18 December 2011.

Of ten self-nominated candidates, five were registered for the collection of signatures. In addition to these, another candidate, Grigory Yavlinsky, collected signatures on behalf of his nomination by a party without Duma Representation.

Five candidates were successfully registered: Putin, Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy, Mironov, and Prokhorov. On the basis of signature verification issues, the RF CEC rejected Yabloko candidate Yavlinsky's registration, and self-nominated candidate Dmitry Mezentsev.

4. CAMPAIGNING

Most of the candidates' regional headquarters were minimally active, relying primarily on both free and paid airtime. Very few headquarters distributed party publications. Large advertisements were placed mostly only in large cities. Active campaigning was only visible in regions preparing for important local elections in addition to the presidential elections. Against the backdrop of the mostly inert activities of candidates' regional headquarters were the much more pronounced activities of public organizations, which organized protests for political reform and fair elections, and also prepared for the monitoring of the upcoming elections.

On 11 January, the CEC explained that Putin has the right not to take a furlough during the electoral campaign. It was explained that according to the law, candidates who work in the civil service,

municipal service, or mass media are not permitted to remain in their places of work during the campaign. According to the CEC, the prime minister's position does not fall into any of these categories.

Alexander Karlin campaigned for Putin on the television program "A Meeting with the Governor," which aired on the station Katun 24 at 10:00 on 28 January 2012. Alexey Orlov, head of the Republic of Kalmykia, delivered a congratulatory address to voters on republican television on 31 December 2011. During the speech, he called on the citizens of the republic to vote for presidential candidate Putin in March 2012. After the New Year holidays, all official newspapers published the address.

Campaigning for Putin was primarily carried out through mass media coverage of the activities of the prime minister, primarily through three nationwide television stations. According to the unofficial data provided by the Levada-Center, Putin's name was mentioned two to three times more frequently than any of the other candidates. According to GOLOS experts, however, his name was mentioned five times more often than Prokhorov's, who follows Putin in this index.

Furthermore, Putin published six policy articles in major newspapers. These articles were not paid for through his election fund, and some of them were published before 6 February -- the official start date for media-based campaign activities.

During the campaign period, Russian television featured several films that displayed signs of pre-election campaigning. Furthermore, several materials were devoted to discrediting opposition human rights organizations.

It should also be noted that Putin refused to participate in televised debates with the other presidential candidates.

There is a great deal of evidence of coercion and financial incentivization for individuals that participated in mass actions in support of Putin.

There were also reports from the regions of pressure on political activists and organizers of the civic movement, "For Fair Elections."

5. PUBLIC OBSERVATION

The failure of the state in its duties to organize and conduct free and fair elections provoked a dramatic increase in the number of citizens interested in serving as public election observers.

Self-nominated candidate Prokhorov, whose headquarters enjoys close cooperation with the Yabloko party, led the active recruitment and training of observers.

Several NGOs also informally led the recruitment and training of observers. Such groups in Moscow and St. Petersburg included: the League of Voters (with the help of a well-known media personalities) the unregistered party Democratic Choice, Citizen Observer (led by D. Oreshkin), Rosvybory (led by A. Navalny), and School of Observers.

Candidate Putin's headquarters actively attracted observers to polling stations as well. Using the resources of higher education institutions, they involved students--especially, young lawyers--in these activities. Dubbed the "Observer Corps," this movement promises observers at all polling stations.

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Correspondents of the newspaper Civic Voice worked in 45 Russian cities. The total number of correspondent groups (with the majority of correspondents having worked in pairs) was 1,218. Correspondents visited approximately 6,400 polling stations.

Correspondents received evidence suggesting that many of the commissions did not fully comply with the procedures provided by law. For example, 7% of correspondents met with difficulties in gaining entry into the polling stations, and 16% reported inconvenient observation conditions. Especially massive departures from the law were observed at the counting stage in approximately one third of the commissions.

6. PRESSURE ON GOLOS ASSOCIATION AND THE MEDIA

Pressures have been directed at GOLOS representatives in the regions. The organization was evicted from its central office in Moscow through the early termination of its lease.

In January, the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) began monitoring the newspaper Civil Voice (Grazhdanskiy Golos). The inspection failed to lead to any findings of serious violations. However, the directive required inspectors to identify at least some sort of observation. A violation report was drafted stating that the mandatory copy of the newspaper sent to the Russian Book Chamber was not on the day of output from the printing press. The lawyers at GOLOS do not believe that this is a violation, and they will now appeal the protocol in court.

In January, the Ministry of Justice audited GOLOS Association. The audit resulted in the issuance of a warning that lawyers at GOLOS are currently analyzing with a view to further action.

Several of GOLOS' regional divisions have been subjected to unscheduled audits of their financial records. Specifically, the financial records of GOLOS' partner organization in Pskov, its Volga division in Samara, and its Moscow offices have all been checked. Prosecutors summoned Vladimir Karataev, coordinator of GOLOS' Adygeya branch. In many of the regions, GOLOS representatives were invited to "talk" with regional FSB departments aimed at combating extremism.

On 18 January Alexander Kalashnikov, head of the Federal Security Service FSB in the Republic of Komi, designated GOLOS and human rights commission Memorial as two of a number of extremist organizations that are active in Komi. He stated in an official report that the activities of these organizations "are directed from abroad, often financed by foreign NGO funding, and are directed

to transform the political system of the Russian Federation," and he emphasized that their main goal is "to disrupt the conduct of the presidential elections."

On 23 February, the coordinator of GOLOS' Ulyanovsk branch received a phone call from a man who introduced himself as an FSB official named Viktor, and who conveyed greetings from Alexey Georgievich (another former FSB "curator.") The conversation, held in his personal car, touched on a variety of aspects the coordination of public activities, including GOLOS. The man's request to be sent records was denied.

As in the fall of 2011, independent media outlets were actively pressured. Pressure was exerted against leading independent Russian media outlets Novaya Gazeta, Ekho Moskvyy (Echo of Moscow) and television station Dozhd (Rain).

On 16 February, Dozhd's editorial office received a request from the Zamoskvorechye interregional prosecutor's office "on behalf of the prosecutor's office of Moscow" demanding an explanation of who financed broadcasts of rallies in Bolotnoi Square and on Sakharov Prospekt. Natalia Sindeeva, the channel's owner, reported this. Earlier in December 2011, the Roskomnadzor studied the channel's broadcasts from 5-6 December to ensure compliance with the law.

On 14 February Gazprom-Media demanded the early resignation of the Ekho Moskvyy board of directors, and a change in the composition of independent directors. This impacted Editor-in-Chief of radio station Ekho Moskvyy, Alexei Venediktov, his first assistant Vladimir Varfolomeev, as well as independent directors Evgeni Yasin and Alexander Makovsky. The creative team resolutely advocated against their departures; however, the dispute between the editors and owners--which had lasted since the end of December--ended in favor of the media holding company.

In January, Prime Minister Putin, publicly criticized Ekho Moskvyy, stating at a meeting with chief media editors that the radio station "pours diarrhea from morning until evening." Later, according to Venediktov, President Medvedev criticized the editorial policy of Ekho Moskvyy.

It also became known that on 24 February, the company RU-center--which specializes in the registration of internet domain names, made changes to its procedural rules, whereby without a court ruling the company can close any site on the third level domain if there is suspicion that an offense may have been committed. This was precisely the case for Ekho Moskvyy's website, echo.msk.ru.) It is also noted that the registrar has the right to independently evaluate user activities for legal violations, including in cases where such violations have not been clearly defined by legal regulations. Representatives of the Internet community perceived this as an attempt to introduce censorship. Moreover, in the new regulations Ru-center made no provisions about mass media websites. However, mass media websites are different from others in that the law "On Mass Media" regulates them. Article 16 of the law states that the activities of the mass media may be terminated or suspended only by the decision of either a founder or a court through a civil lawsuit initiated by the registering authority.

7. PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTION DAY

A plan to equip polling stations with video cameras was launched and widely publicized. An enormous sum of money was allocated for the project—13 billion rubles (approx. 330 million Euro)—which exceeds the budget for the entire presidential election campaign. As a result, web cameras were placed in 96% of polling stations. Web cameras recorded footage of everything that happened at these polling stations. The main disadvantage of this initiative--aside from the low degree of efficiency--is that permission to view the footage will be granted only to "participants in the electoral process," as per a decision of the RF Ministry of Communications.

In spite of the statements made by the highest representatives of the communications authority, on the Map of Electoral Violations GOLOS Association indicated the violations of the principle of voluntary participation and freedom of voting. This is most prominently expressed in the compulsory receipt of AVCs.

Some reports also indicate that the coercion to receive AVCs is related to coercion to vote at one's workplace, to inform management about the number of AVCs, and in some cases even to submit AVCs to company leadership.

More broadly than in previous elections, efforts have been made to control the vote. Toward this end, a number of businesses declared 4 March a workday, and then established polling stations within company premises. It should be mentioned that in these cases, electoral commissions are formed from staff members of a given company, there are no web cameras in these polling stations, and it is very difficult for observers to access them.

There have been reports of management requiring that their subordinates confirm having voted for a particular candidate by photographing their completed ballots.

Reports have also been submitted about the traditional method of compiling voter lists outside of the premises with the help of social workers.

8. VOTING AND COUNTING

Positive assessments were made with regard to the equipment of a significant number of polling stations. Many utilized new stationary ballot boxes made of transparent material and containing narrow openings in order to hinder ballot-stuffing efforts.

GOLOS Association notes the low efficiency of the equipping of polling stations with Internet surveillance cameras. In many polling stations, cameras were located far away from ballot boxes, places of ballot issuance, and places used for the counting of votes. In many cases, voters were obscured by ballot boxes when depositing their ballots. Internet broadcasts of the camera footage were conducted intermittently, but there was practically no footage of a number of polling stations.

Nonetheless, the presence of cameras and the possibility of online broadcasts have enabled citizens conducting Internet surveillance to identify a number of irregularities, including acts of ballot stuffing.

The Association also notes the unsatisfactory situation of voting with AVCs. There were a great many reports of refusals to issue AVCs to voters on the basis of their absence from their designated PECs. In our opinion, this was the result of the mass coercion of voters to vote using AVCs, and the organized "carousel voting" of groups of citizens. At the same time, we acknowledge the failure of the electoral commission system to efficiently solve issues related to the lack of AVCs.

9. ANALYSIS OF REPORTS RECEIVED ON GOLOS ASSOCIATION'S HOTLINE AND MAP OF ELECTORAL VIOLATIONS ON ELECTION DAY

The GOLOS Association has implemented the Map of Electoral Violations (MEV) [<http://www.kartanarusheniy.org/>], a website that served as a platform for Russian citizens to report evidence of violations throughout the electoral campaign. The MEV has received more than 8,600 reports, and the hotline operators accepted more than 6,000 calls. Moderators of the MEV published 3,788 reports of possible violations, many of which were supported by documentation. As of the morning of 5 March, moderators anticipate over 1,000 reports, some of which will be published on the MEV.

On Election Day and during the summarization of the results of the MEV, more than 2,000 reports were excluded, having been deemed defective by moderators. GOLOS' corps of short-term correspondents systemically analyzed the implementation of legislatively established procedures in the PECs.

"Carousel voting" by groups of voters was the violation most commonly cited in reports.

The following violations were also frequently cited within the reports:

During the voting period:

- Non-admittance of media representatives into the polling stations;
- Violations in the design of polling stations;
- Stuffing of ballots;
- The removal of observers, election commission members, and media representatives.

During the counting period:

- Violations of the legislatively established procedures for counting votes;
- Tampering with ballots during the sorting process.

The largest numbers of reports were sent from Moscow, Moscow oblast, Samara oblast, and St. Petersburg.

There were numerous reports on violations of the rights of observers: prohibitions against the taking of photo and video footage, impossible observation conditions created by the relegation of observers into inconvenient locations and the prohibition of free movement around the premises,

failures of the commissions to consult documents, and failures of the commissions to accept and consider allegations of violations.

Correspondents of the GOLOS run newspaper “Grazhdanskiy golos” (Civic Voice) noted in their special questionnaires the implementation statutory procedures for voting and counting. The results accumulated in regional databases, which are then combined into a national database.

The SMS-CEC project [<http://sms.golos.org/>] compiled data elicited from 1,533 protocols. Correlation inspections were carried out for all of these.

In evaluating the preliminary data on the outcome of the vote, attention was first drawn to the significant contrast between the official preliminary results of voting and the results announced by the exit polls. Preliminary data available on the morning of 5 March suggested that Putin had received approximately 64% of the vote, whereas exit polls conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation FOM gave Putin 59.3%, and exit polls conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center VCIOM gave him 58.3%. Such differences exceed the usual margin of error for exit polls.

Attention is also drawn to the differences in regional voting results. While these differences are less pronounced than those of the 2011 State Duma elections, they are still quite large: results in favor of Putin range from 47.7% in Moscow to 99.8% in the Chechen Republic. Among the territories and oblasts where Putin enjoyed the greatest success was the Kemerovo oblast, where he gained 77.2% of the vote.

Based on this data, GOLOS Association asserts that the final stage of the RF presidential election campaign (including voting and counting) as with the previous stages, was marred by a large number of violations of electoral law. Although the scale of these violations was--according to our estimates--smaller than that of the 2011 State Duma elections, these violations nonetheless significantly affected the results of the vote.

10. ANALYSIS OF THE OBSERVATION BY THE CORRESPONDENTS OF GOLOS

Characteristics	Presidential Elections, 4 March 2012		Election to the State Duma, 4 December 2011	
	Number of reports	% featuring these characteristics	Number of reports	% featuring these characteristics
Failure to present ballot boxes for voting	1217	6%	1659	5%
Absence of opportunities to view the list of voters	1162	7%	1583	7%
Ballots were distributed without signatures	1108	13%	1549	13%
Campaign materials were placed within 50 m. from the polling station	6854	4%	3779	8%
Absent summary poster of all candidates	6872	3%	3802	5%
Voter lists were not bound	6805	6%	3744	4%
Violations of procedures for the issuance of ballots	6665	4%	3667	8%
Information about ballot stuffing, bribery, "carousel voting"	6608	3%		
Transportation of voter groups	6576	6%	3524	6%
Group voting by use of AVCs	6640	5%	3584	5%
Pressure on voters during voting process	6725	1%		
Use of "lists" for voting outside of the polling station	5690	23%	3034	25%
Failure to gain familiarity with the voter list for mobile voting	6217	5%	3779	7%
Failure to be present for mobile voting	5970	8%	3317	6%
Mobile ballot boxes kept out of view of observers	6740	14%	3722	12%
Failure to announce counting data for each voter register	573	40%	1471	46%
Failure to verify the accuracy of counts with reference to voter lists	341	10%	1424	7%
Failure to announce the number of applications prior to opening mobile ballot boxes	546	14%	1441	23%
Failure to follow procedures for the sorting of ballots	473	18%	1283	26%
Failure to observe counting	474	22%	1279	25%

procedures for sorted bundles				
Impossibility of seeing marks on ballots	473	18%	1276	20%
Untimely entry of data into enlarged form of protocol	574	33%	approx.1300	32-36%
Failure to adhere to counting phases	572	17%	1457	24%
Protocol drafted outside of the voting premises	574	7%		
Failure of PEC to hold final meeting	561	30%	1417	39%
Failure of observers to place signatures on packets	515	8%	1335	6%
Failure to observe protocol signature procedures	564	7%	1414	9%
No list of complaints included in the protocol	489	18%	1143	29%
Copies of protocol not promptly issued	575	5%	1435	9%
Commission did not make copies of protocol	572	12%	1445	27%
Administrative officials present during the count	554	14%	1438	13%
Higher commission representatives present during the count	554	8%	1430	9%
Difficulties in gaining entry into polling station	7017	7%	1669	10%
Inconvenient conditions for observers	7001	16%	3791	16%
Restrictions on the location and free movement of observers	6972	7%	3745	10%
Illegal restrictions on photo and video recordings	6909	7%	3652	9%
Removal of observers, commission members	6891	3%	3725	5%
Enlarged form of the protocol inconveniently located	30	7%	62	21%
Not all people with rights to be present were granted entry into TEC building	29	7%	62	11%
TEC restricted free movement of observers	28	14%	62	19%

The coverage of polling stations by representatives of various candidates (excluding members with decisive voting rights) was divided as follows:

2012	
Zhirinovskiy	40%
Zyuganov	81%
Mironov	47%
Prokhorov	54%
Putin	82%
Other	28%

2011	
United Russia	88%
Communist Party	82%
A Just Russia	75%
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia	51%
Patriots of Russia	14%
Right Cause	15%
Yabloko	23%
Other	13%

According to reports by correspondents of the newspaper Civic Voice, the average number of observers in the morning was 5.2 for each PEC. In the evening, the average was 8.9 per PEC. During the 4 December 2011 Duma elections, these numbers were 1.6 and 2.1, respectively.