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POLICY BRIEF / APRIL 2018

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# The 2018 Presidential Election in Russia

Policy Brief – Vsevolod Vereshchahin, April 2018

Lately, the elections in Russia have ceased to be taken seriously as elections. Vladimir Putin, the world-famous leader of Russia, was predictably re-elected for his fourth term in the office. Thus, Putin received a mandate to run the country until 2024, which makes his mandate the second longest in terms of its duration in modern Russian history, after Stalin.

According to the Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation Zorkin, the most accurate name for Russian form of government is a mixed presidential-parliamentary republic. In the Russian reality this means that the president has very broad powers and is fully the head of executive. In fact, it all boils down to the fact that the executive has indirect control over the legislative and judicial, which creates a serious imbalance among the branches of power. In such circumstances, the formation of the Central Election Commission is actually carried out under the control of the executive power, which has direct consequences in terms of its impartiality.

## Candidates overview

Eight people have passed the verification of 300,000 signatures required for the registration as a candidate for the presidency of Russia. Given the absolute control of the executive power over the CEC, only those who either played a certain role in the election or did not pose a threat to

the ruling regime were registered. So, the octet of candidates running for the presidency was consisted of:

*Vladimir Putin*, who was nominated for the presidency for the fourth time. Critics drew attention to the fact that Putin's nomination even for a third term contradicts the constitution, but the CEC interpreted the article in such a way that no one can run for the presidency more than twice in a row. Thus, Putin's candidacy was not considered as a problem because Dmitrij Medvedev was ruling the country from 2008 to 2012. Vladimir Putin's program was the Message to the Federal Assembly, delivered on March 1, 2018, which had a great (but not only positive) response in the society. According to official figures, during the election he scored 76.69% of the vote.

*Pavel Grudinin*, quite unexpected candidate from the Communist Party of Russian Federation. Before, usually the head of the Communist Party Zyuganov was nominated, but this time they decided to change their policy. He is a director of the "Lenin State Farm", one of the most famous strawberry producers in the country. However, until recently, Grudinin had nothing to do with the Communists, in the year 2000 he was a confidant of Vladimir Putin, until 2010 he was a member of the United Russia Party (the ruling party in Russia). There is an opinion that the participation of candidate Grudinin in the election pursued a goal to increase the voter turnout in the country, as well as to maintain the image of competitive election. According to official data, during the

election he scored 11.77% of the vote and won the second place.

*Vladimir Zhirinovskiy*, the permanent leader of the LDPR, four times was a candidate for the presidency of Russia and never even took the second place. An eccentric populist, Zhirinovskiy expresses the most aggressive moods in society. The reason of his participation in the elections is state funding, which he and his party regularly receive. According to the CEC, he scored 5.65% of the vote.

*Ksenia Sobchak* was perhaps the most controversial candidate – she is very well known in society, and also very unpopular. Before the nomination, Sobchak met with Putin and probably discussed with him her nomination. According to insiders and the media, her candidacy was invented in the bowels of the Kremlin in order to divert attention from oppositionist Alexei Navalny. In addition, in view of her radical views, her candidacy could be used as an attempt to alienate voters from the opposition. She gained 1.68% of votes, according to official data.

*Grigory Yavlinsky*, the leader of party “Yabloko” (“Apple”) which was popular in the nineties, has never been to the State Duma for the past 15 years. He is an opposition figure, together with Sobchak does not support the annexation of the Crimea and believes that a repeated referendum must be held. Lately, he has lost his popularity in society not only due to his untimely statements about the policy of the authorities (when the government and Putin support was higher than 80%), but also because he does not propose anything new since he got into politics, which happened in 1990. Consequently, his recognizability has fallen sharply. According to the official data, he resulted with 1.05% of total votes.

*Boris Titov*, the president's authorized representative for the protection of entrepreneurs' rights. He claimed that the main goal of his campaign was the promotion of his economic program. As an employee of the presidential administration, Titov is mentioned in the "Kremlin report" of the US Treasury, which clearly indicates his role as a fictitious candidate in the past election. Has typed 0.76% of votes.

*Maxim Suraykin*, chairman of the party "Communists of Russia", the party-spoiler of the Communist Party of Russian Federation. He has gained 0.68% and is of no interest.

*Sergei Baburin*, a relatively popular politician of the 90's, but now also not of interest. Promoted ideas, similar to the course of the ruling party. Resulted with 0.65% of votes.

An important character in the last presidential election was *Alexei Navalny*, who is considered the main opponent of the current Russian government, and therefore the main leader of the opposition. On December 25, 2017, the CEC refused to register Navalny as a candidate for the upcoming presidential election because of an unexpunged or unexpired convictions in “the Kirovless case”. The Supreme Court did not satisfy Navalny's complaint against the decision of the CEC. The Constitutional Court refused to consider his complaint. All this took place against the backdrop of the fact that the European Court of Human Rights found the verdict null and void, while Russian legislation in this case provides for the supremacy of the decisions of the ECHR over its own.

### Political campaigns

The most significant and large-scale pre-election political campaign can be definitely called the campaign of Alexei

Navalny. He was the first to announce his intention to participate in the election (December 13, 2016), and since that time he conducted active agitation. In the conditions of non-admission to television, the main mouthpiece of his propaganda was YouTube, where he published oppositional videos. A serious stage was the release of the movie “Don’t call him “Dimon””, which exposed Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and proved his direct involvement in corruption schemes. The film scored 26 million views and aroused public resonance, followed by an all-Russian rally that took place on March 26, 2017 in 82 cities of Russia and became the largest since the protests of 2011. The rally did not end with anything other than the detention of more than 1,000 people, including Navalny. Subsequently, he organized two more rallies: on June 26, 2017, when even more people came to the streets than on March 26 (up to 98 thousand people), Navalny was arrested again. On October 10, 2017, due to Navalny's regular stay under arrest and other reasons, fewer people came to the streets – from 2560 to 21520 people. This difference is caused by the comparison of police and protesters' data.

During the Navalny campaign, more than 69 "election headquarters" were opened, each of which during its existence campaigned first for nominating Navalny for the election, and after the refusal of the CEC for the boycott that Navalny announced. In addition, during the campaign, he visited 46 Russian regions in order to communicate with voters.

Vladimir Putin announced his nomination on December 6, 2017 during a meeting with workers of the GAZ auto plant. In contrary to Navalny, Putin's campaign was very quick and modest. Putin himself, unlike other

registered candidates, did not take part in the election debates, and also refused the free airtime on the federal television allocated to him by law as a presidential candidate. The key goal of Putin's election campaign, as the government representative, was to increase the turnout at the election to reach the 70/70 threshold (turnout/Putin's support), and the entire election system of 2018 was built for this purpose. Attraction of outside candidates, manipulations with their popularity, use of government resources and falsifications – all this was used to reach the turnout threshold. The only real agitation event during the campaign of Vladimir Putin was an appeal to the Federal Assembly on March 1, filled with loud promises and predictions.

On December 23, 2017 Congress of the Communist Party nominated Pavel Grudinin, director of "Lenin State Farm", as a candidate for the presidency of the Russian Federation. The combination of his rhetoric, close to the older generation, being a new person in politics, and the support of the Communist Party led to the fact that among the registered candidates he became the only one who overcame, according to official figures, a threshold of 10%. At certain points, he became popular enough to start attracting votes from Putin's audience, which was the reason for the rapid detection of a large amount of compromising material on him. During the campaign, he traveled around the country in order to meet with voters and various organizations, conduct an extensive agitation on the Internet; and participate in the debates. Of course, he used the well-established infrastructure of the Communist Party, a party that has been operating in Russia since 1993, in turn, adopting the structure of the CPSU.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy was a candidate in all presidential elections in Russia,

except the one in 2004. In 2018, he conducted a completely typical campaign for himself – he traveled to the regions of Russia, met with voters, etc. As usual, he behaved very eccentrically, even during participation in the debates on state television, but it did not cause any interest in Russian society any longer.

Ksenia Sobchak announced her nomination as "Candidate against all". Being an opposition politician, she led a modest campaign, her nomination and subsequent actions aroused sharp criticism from all her opponents, including Alexei Navalny.

### Election debates

Initially, the attitude towards the election, or, as they were called "Putin's re-election", in the society was negative and did not cause any interest, which only increased after the inadmissibility of Navalny. The format of the debate was changed from dialogues between two candidates for general debate, in which all candidates simultaneously participated. Except Putin, of course.

Sometimes debates can determine the fate of the elections. For example, in 1960 Kennedy was able to win the election from Nixon precisely because of the debate. However, in no way it applies to the current Russian discussions of candidates on television. First, the main candidate does not participate in them. This makes debates meaningless by 90%. From a real battle, they turned into a mindless performance, which did not affect the final result in any way. The second reason is the format itself. It was built in such a way that the discussions of candidates practically did not take place. The chosen format provided the highest possible ratings for such a genre, while serious candidate monologues would have been

interesting only if someone from the "magnificent seven" had at least the slightest chance to translate their ambitions into reality. Therefore, the debates did not influence the final distribution of the votes.

During one of many presidential TV debates, Grudinin publicly refused to participate in the event and left the studio. After that, the debate finally lost any interest from the public.

### Putin's participation

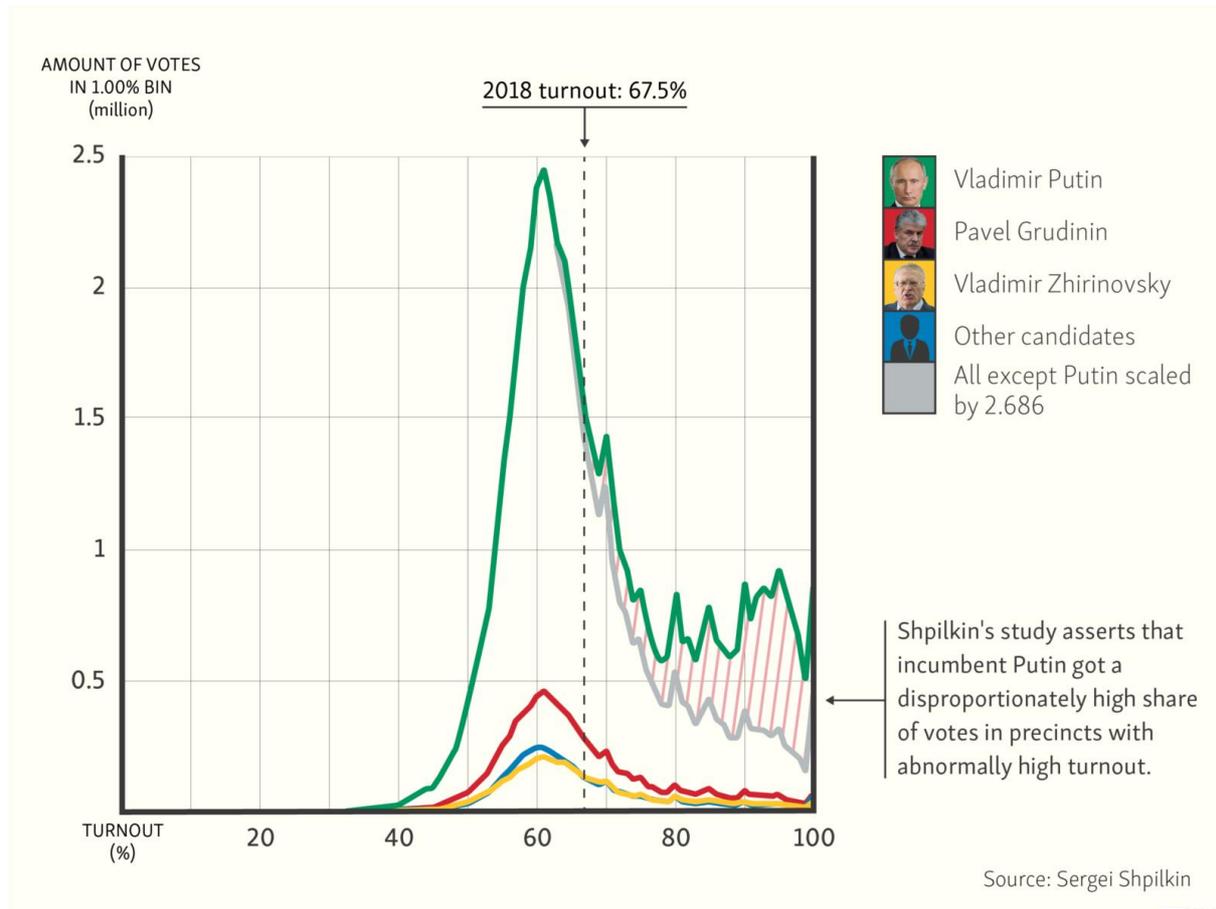
As already mentioned, Putin did not participate in the debates. However, in addition, he also did not attend the filing of his own documents for registration as a presidential candidate. In general, throughout the entire election campaign, he made it clear in all possible ways that the result is predetermined, he is not interested in elections, and the reason for this is his extreme busyness as a current president. According to the official website of Putin's campaign, from 8 to 22 January, his volunteers collected more than 1,600,000 signatures with the required amount of 300,000. Such a gap between the necessary threshold and collected signatures was made in order to emphasize the nationwide support to Putin and his non-alternativeness as the leader of the country. In general, almost everything related to the election campaign was made without the personal participation of the president.

### Throw-ins and other methods of falsification

The Russian elections have long been known for their massive falsifications. Parliamentary (2011) and presidential (2012) elections led to the most mass protests in the history of the country and ended in the persecution of the opposition and the strengthening of the

regime. The most frequently observed method of falsification was the banal throw-in of votes. Members of the election commission on polling stations threw ballots into ballot boxes. They were not even embarrassed by the presence of video surveillance.

with a passport on election day. Also, the election was deliberately moved from the second Sunday in March (which corresponds to the laws of the Russian Federation) to the third, thus they passed on March 18 – the anniversary of the annexation of the



According to research conducted by the physicist Sergei Shpilkin, known for his analysis of the Russian elections, the total number of votes thrown in for Vladimir Putin was about 10 million.

In the course of this election, for the ruling regime the task of paramount importance was to raise the voter turnout. Therefore, they resorted to a variety of measures: under the threat of dismissal employees of state organizations and universities students were forced to go to the election; even parents of pupils by compulsory attendance of parents at school events

Crimea, which should also raise the turnout by attracting citizens who support annexation.

The Kremlin also attracted citizens to polling stations by organizing concerts, sport events, fairs and distributing discount coupons for food, medicines and jewelry on the voting day. In addition, simultaneously with the presidential election, more than 100 not binding local referendums were held.

## Conclusion

The presidential election in Russia was held on March 18, 2018. The most important persons in this election were V. Putin, A. Navalny, P. Grudinin, K. Sobchak and V. Zhirinovskiy. The outcome of the election was not a surprise to anyone, but the campaign itself is of interest.

The Kremlin was clearly concerned that the low turnout would seriously undermine Putin's legitimacy. The question of turnout became extremely politicized after the charismatic oppositionist Alexei Navalny called for a boycott of the election.

Thanks to the skillful use of social networks and the organization of anti-corruption demonstrations, Navalny has a large number of supporters in the country. However, he was not allowed to participate in the election, because he has a criminal record for fraud. Navalny claims that this verdict was politically motivated and was specially planned by the Kremlin to prevent him from participating in the election.

According to reports, the Kremlin expected a minimum turnout of 70% to confirm the legitimacy of the election in the eyes of the population and the world community. At the same time, they set a goal in 70% of support for Putin for the same purpose. This threshold was achieved, however, at the cost of the off-scale level of violations of voting rules, and consequently, the main principles of democratic regime. Votes throw-ins, manipulations of the number of voters, coercion to vote – all this happened massively during the presidential election in Russia.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Putin was re-elected for a fourth time. By the end of his six-year term, we will witness 24 years of Putin's «modern» Russia.

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