



Elections in Russia

The March 4 Presidential Election

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia
International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by Russian election authorities as of March 2, 2012, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

What position are Russians voting for during the March 4, 2012, elections?

Registered voters will be electing the president of the Russian Federation in this election. Local elections in many regions will be held at the same time, but these have attracted negligible domestic and international attention.

What is the role of the president of Russia?

The Russian system has been described as a “super-presidential” system, wherein the president holds significant control over all branches of government. The president of the Russian Federation serves as head of state and the guarantor of the constitution. He is responsible for defining basic domestic policy and foreign policy for the state. The president also serves as commander and chief of the Russian Armed Forces and holds the power to declare martial law. The president appoints regional governors and most members of the executive branch, including ministers.

The president also presents a candidate for prime minister to the State Duma (parliament) for approval. If the State Duma rejects the president’s selection for prime minister three times, the president holds the power to dissolve the State Duma. The president also proposes judicial candidates to the parliament for the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Higher Arbitration Court, and appoints judges for all other courts.

The president, as a position, has broad authority. The parliament and prime minister have little real power to challenge the president. However, as seen in the current configuration, the prime minister can exercise significant influence on the direction of policy. The constitution delineates the relationship between the different branches of government, and although a balance of power is established the president has the largest role in decision making.

Why is this presidential election so important?

The Russian Federation has only had three presidents since 1991. The role and power of the presidency has expanded since the turn of the century, as former President Vladimir Putin increased the Kremlin’s control of civil affairs considerably.

Russian Federation presidents are limited to two consecutive terms, but there is no limit on the number of nonconsecutive terms. The presidential term had been a four-year term, but was extended to a six-year term in 2008. The president elected in the 2012 elections will be the first to serve this six-year term.

This election is important because of the considerable influence the president has over all aspects of state policy, particularly in foreign relations. With a six-year term and an allowance for presidents to serve two consecutive terms, whoever is elected on March 4 could serve until 2024. If Prime Minister Putin is elected, at the end of his term in 2018, he will have served as president of the Russian

Federation for 14 years. This would be the longest period of time that an individual has led Russia since Leonid Brezhnev's tenure as general secretary of the Soviet Union ended in 1982. Further, Putin will have the capability to run for another term after 2016, meaning he could conceivably serve as president for future terms.

The rise of the grassroots opposition movement in response to the December 2011 State Duma elections has led to increased tensions in advance of the presidential election. Largely in response to protester demands, President Dmitry Medvedev proposed several reform initiatives in the electoral sphere that were adopted in the first reading by the Russian Duma on February 28. These initiatives are being further discussed by a working group of parliamentary deputies and "non-systemic" opposition parties.¹ The working group will continue to review and revise working drafts of proposed legislation, including proposals that ease registration rules for political parties; reduce the number of required signatures that independent candidates and parties must gather; elect half the deputies in the Duma directly, in single mandate constituencies, instead of by party list; and reinstate direct election of governors. This reform package is expected to be signed into law by President Medvedev before the end of his term.

Which institutions have legal authority in Russian elections?

The Federation Council has authority to call presidential elections as per the Constitution of the Russian Federation. The Ministry of Justice and its territorial agencies serve as the federal executive body tasked with adopting decisions on state registration of political parties and its regional branches. The Ministry of Justice works with the Federal Tax Service, an entity that performs the registration upon receiving the Ministry of Justice's decision.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) is tasked with the administration of elections. The CEC and its composite entities prepare and conduct the presidential election, starting with the notification of citizens, voting process, compilation and tabulation of results and announcing the outcome. Election management bodies also are the first entities to address election disputes, which can involve the court system. To prepare for the elections, the CEC implements a training process for all members of subject, territorial and precinct election commissions.

How is the election administration structured? What is its composition?

The CEC is composed of 83 Subject Election Commissions (SEC), 2,746 Territorial Election Commissions (TEC) and 94,300 Precinct Election Commissions (PEC). The CEC, SECs and TECs are permanent bodies, appointed every five years. New PEC bodies are appointed for each election. The PECs are formed no later than 50 days prior to the election.

¹ Non-systemic opposition parties are those groups and people who are not part of the parliament or who do not agree to collaborate with the Kremlin (e.g., Kasparov, Nemtsov, etc.). Although not all non-systemic opposition groups joined in the discussions, this is the first time parliamentary groups and non-systemic opposition groups are working together.

The TECs finalized the PEC appointments on February 9. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has observed that leadership positions in the PECs have not been equally distributed between the political parties.

Registered candidates have the right to request the appointment of a member to the territorial and precinct election commissions to serve in an advisory capacity to the candidate's trustee. Each candidate is limited to having one member serve in an advisory capacity at each electoral commission.

Who will monitor the presidential elections?

Chapter one of the Law on the Election of the President of the Russian Federation states that any citizen that has reached the age of 18 is entitled to participate in monitoring the conduct of the election of the president and the work of the election commissions. This includes the determination of voting returns and election results.

Only candidates, parliamentary parties and the mass media are allowed to appoint election monitors. Because of this, Russian groups involved in election monitoring are restricted to monitoring campaigns; organizing telephone hotlines and websites through which people can report irregularities; and informing the media about these reported violations. It is common for organizations to bypass this restriction by receiving mandates from candidates, parties and the media allowing them to monitor elections at specified polling stations.

In response to accusations of fraud, for the first time, each of the 94,000 polling stations will be equipped with two web cameras – one to continuously monitor the ballot box and the other to provide a general overview of the polling station – and a computer. The cameras will not show the inside of voting booths.

The video from the cameras will be available on a newly-created website to the general public, accessible through a link on the CEC's website. The footage will be preserved at regional election commission centers for one year following the elections with unrestricted access. The live transmission of the video will be stopped during vote counting so counting results do not affect voting in areas where polls are still open. Once all polling stations have closed, live transmission will resume. All video from the vote count will be recorded and made available following the closure of all polls. There is broad public discussion of whether the videos will actually help limit election fraud, since the cameras are unable to capture all parts of the voting process.

The GOLOS Association, an independent election watchdog organization, will be one of the primary Russian civil society organizations monitoring the election. It is planning on receiving mandates to monitor the election from media outlets. GOLOS has trained nearly 6,000 observers throughout Russia to monitor the elections. Other groups – such as the newly-created, Internet-based, non-partisan League of Voters – are preparing to place observers and journalists at each polling station across the country.

Several other public associations, such as Democratic Choice, Grakon and other entities, have recently formed as a reaction to the 2011 Duma election and developed online monitoring capacities in advance of the presidential election. Some online sites were created by journalists, students and bloggers.

Who will observe the presidential elections?

The OSCE, an intergovernmental organization whose mandate includes working toward fair elections, has accepted an official invitation to monitor the 2012 presidential elections. The OSCE observed the 2011 State Duma elections and last observed a Russian presidential election in 2004. The OSCE has a core team of 15 experts based in Moscow and 40 long-term observers. They will also deploy 160 short-term observers throughout the country. The OSCE's mission began on January 26, 2012, and will conclude March 15, 2012. A run-off could extend this mandate.

Observers will monitor campaign activities, media coverage, the legislative framework and its implementation; the work of the election administration; and election dispute resolution. The short-term observers will also monitor the opening of poll stations, voting, ballot counting and the tabulation of results. Delegations representing the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperative Organization will also observe the elections.

How will disputes be adjudicated?

Any political party, candidate or voter can register a complaint with local election commissions or courts. The complaints may concern actions, inaction and/or decisions of the election commissions, local or state government agencies or candidates and parties, as long as they can demonstrate their electoral rights were violated. Appeals of decisions can be filed with higher-level election commissions or with the corresponding, relevant court. Appeals to CEC decisions are heard by the Supreme Court.

As confirmed by the OSCE, election commissions are required to investigate the circumstances alleged in a formal complaint and answer, in writing, within five days, but no later than the day before Election Day. In case the resolution of the complaint requires further investigation, the period can be extended to 10 days. The complainant must be notified and given an opportunity to respond.

Following the 2011 State Duma elections, the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights formed a working group to consider election-related complaints. The working group has also made recommendations to state authorities that the presidential election be conducted with increased transparency.

The OSCE also noted a need for legislative clarification between what differentiates "complaints" and "applications," as election commissions are legally required to consider and respond to complaints. The OSCE specifically stated that any submission that refers to the possible violation of laws or procedures should be classified as a complaint and that all complaints and decisions should be posted on the CEC website. It also stated that the role of working groups tasked with reviewing complaints should be clearly defined.

What are Russia’s treaty obligations related to holding democratic elections?

The Russian Federation is a signatory to several international agreements obligating the holding of inclusive, open, democratic elections. The agreements include the Commonwealth of Independent States’ (CIS) Convention of Standards of Democratic Elections, Voting Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States; the Council of Europe’s Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters; the United Nations’ Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers; the CIS’ Resolution of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States on the Use of International Election Standards in the Legislative Practice of the States of the CIS and Europe; and the Draft Convention on Election Standards, Electoral Rights and Freedoms within the framework of Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials (ACEEEO).

What type of electoral system will be used in the March 4 election?

The president is elected directly by the citizens of the Russian Federation through a majoritarian system, with no minimum voter turnout requirements. It is conducted in one electoral district comprised of the entire territory of the Russian Federation and voters abroad. A candidate must receive a majority of the vote in order to be elected.

If no candidate receives a majority of the vote, a second round will be held between the two candidates that received the most votes. The only instance of a second round for presidential elections was in 1996, when Boris Yeltsin failed to receive 50 percent of the vote in the first round.

What is the legal framework for elections in Russia?

A presidential election is primarily regulated by the Law on the Election of the President of the Russian Federation; the Law on the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right of Citizens of the Russian Federation to Participate in a Referendum; the Law on Political Parties; the Law on Rallies, Meetings, Demonstrations, Marching, and Picketing; the Law on the State Automated System of the Russian Federation (known as *GAS Vybory*); and the Code of Administrative Offences.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation also lays out general guidelines for democracy and elections. Article 1, Chapter 1, of the Constitution of the Russian Federation states that: “Russia shall be a democratic federal rule-of-law state with the republican form of government.” Article 3, Chapter 1, states that: “The referendum and free elections shall be the supreme direct manifestation of the power of the people.”

Article 13, Chapter 1, of the Constitution of the Russian Federation states that there shall be no state-sponsored or mandated ideology and that the multi-party system shall be recognized. It also reads: “The establishment and the activities of public associations, whose aims and actions are directed at forcible

alteration of the fundamentals of constitutional governance and violation of the integrity of the Russian Federation and undermining of the security of the state, the forming of armed units, the incitement of social, racial, national and religious strife shall be prohibited.”

Who is eligible to vote?

The constitution provides for universal, equal, direct suffrage by secret ballot to all individuals 18 or older. Federal laws state that voting for president is a voluntary right, and no influence can be exerted upon citizens to have them participate or not participate in the election. It also stipulates that Russian citizens, living outside of the Russian territory, maintain their right to vote and all other electoral rights granted to citizens.

Exceptions to universal suffrage, outlined in the constitution, include Russian citizens “recognized by court as legally unfit, as well as citizens kept in places of confinement by a court sentence.”

Who can be a candidate?

Anyone 35 years of age or older who has permanently resided within Russia for the 10 years preceding the election can seek election for president.

Exceptions to this, outlined in the constitution, include persons who have served as president of the Russian Federation for the two previous terms and persons “recognized by court as legally unfit, as well as citizens kept in places of confinement by a court sentence.”

Federal law further prohibits individuals who have citizenship or any permanent residence permit for another state from being registered as candidates. It also prohibits candidature for individuals who have been charged with, or are serving a sentence for, a grave or extremist crime.

Persons holding a public office are permitted to run for president and are not required to resign their office, but they are prohibited from using their position to campaign.

What are the laws on nominating a candidate?

Candidates can be nominated by political parties that are entitled to take part in elections, or can self-nominate. Nominations can be made after the publication of the decision to call presidential elections. The March 4, 2012, election was called on November 25, 2011.

According to current law, a candidate must receive 2 million signatures in support of their nomination, with no more than 50,000 signatures coming from one of the 83 electoral districts of the Russian Federation. Candidates nominated by political parties that had a member elected to the State Duma in the preceding election are exempt from this requirement.

In order to receive 2 million signatures, approximately one out of every 54 registered voters in Russia must sign the candidate’s list. The signature collectors must list their information and sign the list they

compile, and their signatures must be notarized. All registration documents, including signature lists, must be submitted no earlier than 80 days and no later than 45 days before the election. This provides candidates with 55 days to collect signatures.

The CEC reviews at least 20 percent of the signatures in an initial verification. The CEC must review an equal number of signatures for each candidate in the initial review. If more than 5 percent of the reviewed signatures are found invalid or unauthentic, then the CEC will review at least 10 percent more. Candidates' registrations will be rejected if more than 5 percent of the signatures are found invalid or unauthentic.

The signature list submitted must not have more than 2.1 million signatures. Signatures will also be excluded if they are duplicates; deemed to be false by government experts; contain mistakes or technical inaccuracies; are filled out in pencil; are not filled out by hand; or include some kind of hand written annotation or correction of a technical nature.

In the current campaign opposition, political party Yabloko's candidate Gregory Yavlinsky was denied registration based on the disqualification of a large portion of his signatures, alleged by the CEC experts.

No public associations, with the exception of associations that qualify as a political party under federal law, are permitted to nominate candidates for elected office. In order to nominate a candidate, a political party must have submitted all appropriate documents to be registered as a party prior to the decision to call the election.

What are the laws on political parties?

The constitution recognizes political plurality and a multi-party system. Federal law guarantees the equality of political parties before the law, regardless of the ideology, objectives and goals set out in their constituent and program documents. Citizens have the right to form, join and refrain from joining political parties.

Federal law, however, prohibits the creation of political parties on a professional, racial, national or religious basis (i.e. advocacy for such groups). Displaying fascist symbols is also prohibited, although fascist paraphernalia is not uncommon in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Political parties must have all of its bodies within the territory of the Russian Federation. They must have regional branches with at least 50 members in at least half of the 83 federal subjects of the Russian Federation, with half of those branches having at least 100 members. Political parties must also have at least 10,000 total members.

A political party is the only type of organization admitted to regional and federal elections.

What are the rules on campaigning?

Federal law states that any citizen that has reached the age of 18 is entitled to participate in election campaigning. They are allowed to organize demonstrations, marches and picketing. Citizens 16 years of age or older can organize meetings and rallies.

Organizers must notify appropriate government agencies of their intent to hold such an event 10 to 15 days prior to the event. Government agencies can choose to have an organizer move the event to a different location. The event cannot take place adjacent to courts, and can only be held adjacent to the Kremlin (including in the Red Square) with the approval of the president of the Russian Federation.

Participants of a meeting, rally, demonstration, marches or picketing are fined if procedures for establishing or conducting such events are not followed. Fines are increased for blocking transport lines. Participation in rallies, meetings, demonstrations, marches or picketing must be voluntary.

The constitution states that: "propaganda or campaigning inciting social, racial, national or religious hatred and strife is impermissible. The propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or language superiority is forbidden." The constitution also declares freedom of the media and prohibition of media censorship.

What are the rules governing the media?

Candidates and political parties that nominate registered candidates receive free television, radio and print media campaign advertising from state-funded media outlets. Candidates and political parties receive one hour of campaign advertisements from every state-funded television and radio station. State-funded newspapers are required to allocate 5 percent of the total weekly space for advertisements. Half of the space is split between candidates and the other half is split between political parties. Election advertising on the radio and television and in print can only begin to run 28 days before Election Day.

Parties that receive less than 3 percent lose access to free mass media for the next campaign. This system heavily slants elections towards candidates who are affiliated with political parties, as they receive more than twice the amount of free advertising as independent candidates.

The CEC has set up an Election 2012 Information Center at their headquarters to provide coverage of the election and its results. The Information Center will receive real-time results from the electoral automated system called *GAS Vybory*. Media representatives must apply for accreditation in order to work in the information center.

What are the rules for campaign finance?

Individuals are not allowed to make campaign contributions to a political party that is more than 10 times the minimum monthly wage established on March 1, 2011, prior to Election Day. Legal entities are not allowed to donate more than 100 times that wage in a year.

Political parties are not allowed to receive more than 10 million times the established minimum monthly wage in a year. The monthly minimum wage was 4,330 rubles on March 1, 2011.

Candidates are prohibited from spending more than 400 million rubles on their campaign. All campaign-related expenses must be paid for using the candidate's campaign bank account, which the CEC has the right to monitor. The CEC must submit information on income and expenditure of candidates to the media at least every two weeks.

Political parties may not accept campaign donations from foreign states; foreign legal entities; foreign nationals; stateless persons; citizens under the age of 18; Russian legal entities which are more than 30 percent held by foreign stakeholders; international organizations and movements; government bodies or organizations; legal entities which are more than 30 percent held by the government; the military; charitable or religious institutions; legal entities registered less than a year before the attempted donation; and anonymous donors.

Political parties are entitled to funds from the federal budget if they received 3 percent of the vote in the preceding State Duma elections, elected at least 12 members to the State Duma or received at least 3 percent of the vote for the previous presidential election. The parties receive 20 rubles per vote received, per year. This has the effect of providing substantial public funding for the majority party, while relegating minor parties to continued obscurity.

The Federal Tax Service is responsible for control over the sources of income of political parties, the amount of funds received by them and payment of taxes.

By what means will Russian citizens vote in this election?

Early voting begins two weeks before Election Day in 817 polling stations located in very remote areas. Voting with the use of ballot scanners and touch-screen machines will take place in 5,566 polling stations. This is 411 more than during the 2011 State Duma elections.

Who are the registered presidential candidates for the March 4 election?

The CEC registered five candidates, four of whom have been registered candidates in previous presidential elections:

- Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin United Russia (ER)
- Gennady Andreyevich Zyuganov Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF)

- Vladimir Volfovich Zhirinovskiy Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)
- Mikhail Dimitrievich Prokhorov Self-Nominated
- Sergei Mikhailovich Mironov A Just Russia (FR)

Vladimir Putin received broad support in his two previous presidential campaigns. In 2000, he received 52.94 percent of the vote and in 2004 he received 71.31 percent of the vote.

In the 1996 presidential election, Gennady Zyuganov prevented Boris Yeltsin from receiving the majority of the vote in the first round, forcing the election to a second round, where he received 40.3 percent of the vote. Zyuganov finished a distant second in the 2000 and 2008 elections to Putin and Medvedev, respectively.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has run for president four times previously. In 2008, Zhirinovskiy finished third with 9.48 percent of the vote, a marked increase over the totals he obtained in his three previous campaigns.

Independent Mikhail Prokhorov is the only candidate not to have previously run for president. He is the only self-nominated candidate to be registered. He is estimated to be the third richest man in Russia.

Sergei Mironov, of A Just Russia, is a moderate social democrat. His party doubled its previous support in the 2011 State Duma elections, winning 13.24 percent of the vote.

Who was denied candidature for the presidential election on March 4?

The CEC rejected the registration of 11 candidates for not meeting registration requirements or for ineligibility. Reasons for rejection included an insufficient number of signatures, failure to meet the residency requirement, failure to receive endorsement of 500 voters and prior participation in extremist activities.

Most prominently, Grigory Yavlinsky was nominated by Yabloko, a long-standing, opposition social liberal party. The Yabloko Party has not held seats in the State Duma since 2007, so it was required to collect 2 million signatures for Yavlinsky. The CEC determined that 153,928, of the 600,000 signatures he submitted were invalid, bringing Yavlinsky's signature count below the required 2 million. Consequently, the CEC rejected his registration. The problem with the majority of the forms found to be invalid was that they were photocopies, not originals. He appealed the CEC's decision to the Supreme Court, which upheld the CEC's ruling.

Dmitry Mezenstev, the Irkutsk Regional Governor, was denied registration after the CEC determined that enough voter signatures were invalid, which dropped him below the mandated amount.

Eduard Limonov's application to enter the presidential election was rejected because he did not provide a certified protocol from a support meeting. Limonov claims police prevented the meeting from taking place. He attempted to enter the presidential election as an independent because his public association,

Other Russia, has not been registered as a political party. The Supreme Court upheld the CEC's refusal to register Limonov as a candidate.

The registration for former Joint Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Leonid Ivashov was rejected because he did not inform the CEC he was holding a meeting of voters five days prior to the meeting.

Svetlana Peunova is the leader of the unregistered Volya (Will) party. Peunova's registration was rejected by the CEC because she only submitted 243,000 signatures.

The other candidates who were refused registration include: Victor Cherepkov, former mayor of Vladivostok; Renat Khamiev, an Orenburg public figure; Boris Mironov, a nationalistic writer and head of the far-right National Sovereignty Party of Russia; and Nikolai Levashov, a self-described healer.

What is the state of political parties in Russia?

The number of registered political parties has dropped exponentially over the past decade. In 1999, there were 139 political parties that participated in the State Duma elections. This number dropped to 64 for the 2003 State Duma elections. In the 2011 State Duma elections, only seven parties were permitted to participate. The only political party that has been created and registered since 2004 is the Right Cause, widely seen as a pro-Kremlin party.

Neither President Medvedev nor Prime Minister Putin are members of United Russia, despite their positions within the party's hierarchy. The pro-Kremlin United Russia Party was formed in 2003 through an alliance between the Unity Party, a center right party, and the Fatherland—All Russia Party, a center-left party. It subsequently became, and has remained, the majority party in the State Duma.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation has served as the primary opposition party to the ruling party. In each of the five presidential elections of the Russian Federation the communist party finished second.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia is a nationalistic party appealing to citizens supporting right-of-center causes. Just Russia is a democratic socialist party. Through its creation, it engulfed several other socialist opposition forces. Its establishment was supported by the ruling apparatus, as A Just Russia's former leader and current presidential candidate, Sergei Mironov, had strong ties with the Kremlin. The United Russian Democratic Party, also called "Yabloko," is a social liberal party that has not been represented in the current Duma since 2007. Many of Yabloko's members have left and joined A Just Russia or United Russia.

How do voters get registered to vote?

There are 109,947,323 registered voters in the Russian Federation, including 1,794,454 located abroad.

Voter lists are based on residency data and citizens are not required to register themselves, only to verify their information. Voter lists were prepared by the TECs and posted in polling stations on February 13, so the public can verify the information on the list.

How were polling stations allocated to voters?

By law, election precincts are not to contain more than 3,000 voters.

Special polling stations have also been created for hospitals, sanatoriums, detention centers and other places of temporary residence; these polling stations will not be monitored by the cameras that monitor the rest of the stations.

During this election, polling stations will also have special features designed to enfranchise disabled voters and increase transparency of the process. For example, all polling stations will have a voter informational guide available in braille for voters with visual impairment. One voting booth of larger size to accommodate wheelchair-users is also supposed to be made available at the polling stations.

As an additional anti-fraud measure, semi-transparent ballot boxes will be used that will allow confirmation of ballots individually cast, while not compromising voter secrecy. Some polling stations are equipped with optical scanners for ballot casting, while others will include touch screen electronic voting.

How many polling stations will be operational for the presidential elections?

There will be approximately 94,000 polling stations throughout Russia. Of these, 1,504 will be in hospitals, sanatoriums and other places of temporary residence; 83 at railway stations; 31 at airports; and 123 at detention centers. There will also be 384 polling stations open abroad.

The 817 polling stations located in the remotest areas are open up to two weeks before Election Day for early voting. Early voting started in remote locations, on sea-faring vessels and in some polling stations abroad on February 17 and will conclude on March 3.

What has been the media's involvement in the campaign?

The majority of media outlets in Russia are founded, owned or controlled by the government or government affiliated structures. Nevertheless, there has been a robust discussion on the television and radio airwaves about the upcoming election. There has also been unfettered dialogue via online articles

and blogs about expectations for the March 4 election and opposition figures who were earlier “banned” from state media now appearing on TV.

Televised exchanges on all election-related topics have been ever-present on state television in the weeks preceding the vote. While state-sponsored censorship or self-censorship played a large role in previous elections, the current volume and level of discussion on the March 4 vote proves there is expanding dialogue and a diversification of platforms for discussing elections.

Resources:

- The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Chapter 4: The President of the Russian Federation
- The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Chapter 2, Article 32
- Federal Law “On Political Parties” No. 95-FZ, July 11, 2001
- Federal Law “On the Election of the president of the Russian Federation”, No. 19-FZ, July 10, 2003
- Federal Law “On the Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights and the Right of Citizens of the Russian Federation to Participate in a Referendum,” No. 67-FZ, June 12, 2002
- CEC Election Monitoring Website ([link](#))
- United Russia Democratic Voters “Yabloko” Election Monitoring Smartphone Application ([link](#))
- Grakon social networking site ([link](#))
- GOLOS Association ([link](#))
- RosVybory ([link](#))
- Democratic Choice ([link](#))
- OSCE Election Observation ([link](#))