

Regional elections: the government wins, as usual

On 10 October elections to regional parliaments, city councils and mayoralities of cities took place in 77 subjects of the Russian Federation. In all the elections, the 'party of government', United Russia, won: smaller parties linked to the ruling elite also improved their results. Despite President Medvedev's pro-democratic declarations, the electoral process remains under the Kremlin's tight control, and the construction of a 'managed' party scene is continuing.

The average turnout in the elections was 49.14%. In six regions, local parliaments were chosen; United Russia won in every one, winning from 44% to 77% of the votes. Representatives of this party also won the mayors' elections. The greatest support for the 'party of government' was demonstrated by the republics of Northern Caucasus, as is traditional: for example, United Russia won 78% of the votes to the city council of Makhachkala, and its candidate won 92% of the votes for city mayor. The average percentage figure for the Communist party was in the early teens, which confirms the gradual marginalisation of this once influential grouping; in the 1990s Communists could count on around 25% of electoral support. The marginal parties belonging to the so-called 'concession opposition' improved their result, for example the right-wing Just Cause, which was created at the inspiration of the Kremlin. The democratic opposition was practically invisible in these elections (the Yabloko party stood in one region, and did not cross the electoral threshold), the result of the opposition's harassment and isolation by the government.

The elections were accompanied by numerous reports of abuses by local administrative structures (including vote buying and stuffing ballot boxes), the aim of which was to improve the 'party of government's results. Acts of violence took place in the Northern Caucasus republics, as is traditional (for example, the head of the local administration died in a shooting at a polling station in Dagestan). These elections showed once again that the ruling elite still has tight control over the electoral process. <JR>