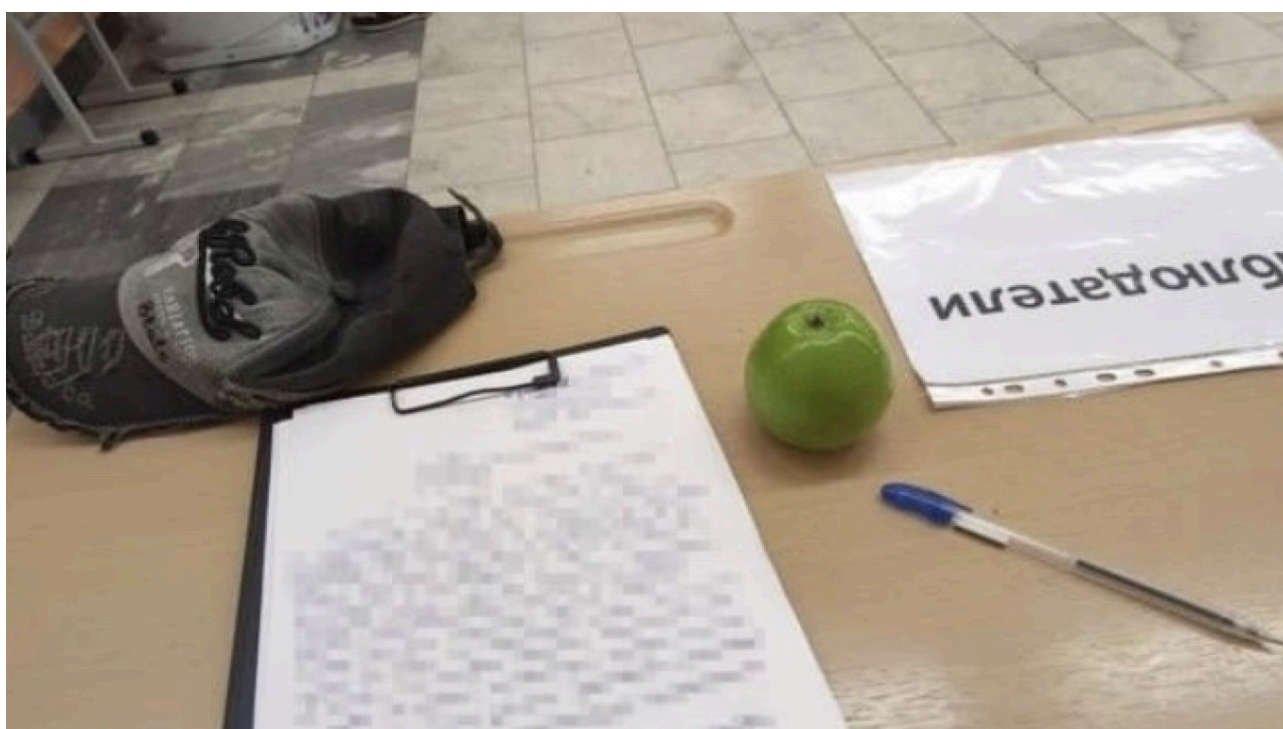


Deep Russia: GROUNDHOG DAY

What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and on "Telegram" from 14 to 20 September

Period	14 - 20 September 2026
Platforms	VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)



An observer put an apple on the table. The head of the commission regarded this as campaigning and called the police. The officers drew up a report, and the fruit was confiscated as an "object of the crime"

Key Findings

"United Russia" enjoyed an advantage in state media and made use of the resources of government bodies and budget-funded institutions. During the election campaign, pressure from employers was recorded, as were demands to register for Remote Electronic Voting and to report back with screenshots. The cancellation of the "Yabloko" federal list in August removed any anti-war alternative.

According to the report on the Central Election Commission meeting on 25 September, turnout reached approximately 59.8%. "United Russia" received 349 seats, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation - 37, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia - 23, "New People" - 19, "A Just Russia" - 17, "Rodina" - 1, and independent candidates - 4.

In the pre-election discussions, the candidates' displays of "good deeds" and calls to vote ran into distrust, reminders of unfulfilled promises and discontent over rising prices for fuel and utilities, low incomes, the state of the roads and the consequences of drone attacks.

The prevailing conviction was that the results had been decided in advance and that officials were detached from people's everyday problems. The main dispute was between supporters of a protest vote for anyone but "United Russia" and those who considered participation pointless because of expected falsifications, the absence of fair competition and distrust of all parties.

On the voting days public groups covered turnout, officials casting their votes and festive events at polling stations, while the comments were dominated by irony and distrust of the electoral process. The festive stories were called a "circus", with people recalling that other mass events had been canceled for security reasons, and early turnout was linked to the coercion of public sector employees and military personnel. Online voting was praised for its convenience, but its reliability was doubted. For the most part, the comments featured reports of administrative pressure, control over voting and probable falsifications, some of which users described as their own observations.

The election results mostly provoked sarcasm, disappointment and accusations of falsification. Commenters questioned the support for "United Russia" and mentioned possible ballot stuffing, administrative resources and non-transparent counting, although there were also isolated positive assessments and denials of violations.

The victory of "United Russia" was linked to the expected rise in prices and tariffs, worsening fuel problems and the continuation of the war, while the disappointment reinforced the conviction that further participation in elections is pointless.

The elections added no trust either in the authorities or in the electoral process. Instead, they cemented the conviction that nothing depends on the voter. The discontent is widespread, but passive.

1. GROUNDHOG DAY

How the "elections" unfolded

Monitoring by "Atlas of Elections" shows [the dominance of "United Russia"](#) on federal television. Television presented the victory of the party of power as a foregone conclusion, leaving the intrigue to the placings of its parliamentary rivals. Support for the military and the social initiatives of "United Russia" candidates were presented as a continuation of state policy.

Administrative resources created additional inequality for parties and candidates. Monitors documented [the use of official resources of government bodies and budget-funded institutions to promote candidates](#), the turning of official trips into campaign events, and pressure through employers. In particular, there were reports of demands to register in the Remote Electronic Voting system and provide screenshots, and of workers at the "Avitek" plant being forced to support designated candidates.

The cancellation of the registration of the federal list [of "Yabloko" removed the possibility of a nationwide vote](#) for an openly anti-war party. At the same time, the cancellation of the list did not mean the automatic removal of all single-mandate candidates.

Over the three days, according to the published official timeline, [cumulative turnout stood at 29.65% after the first day, 44.38% after the second and 56.66% on the evening of the third.](#)

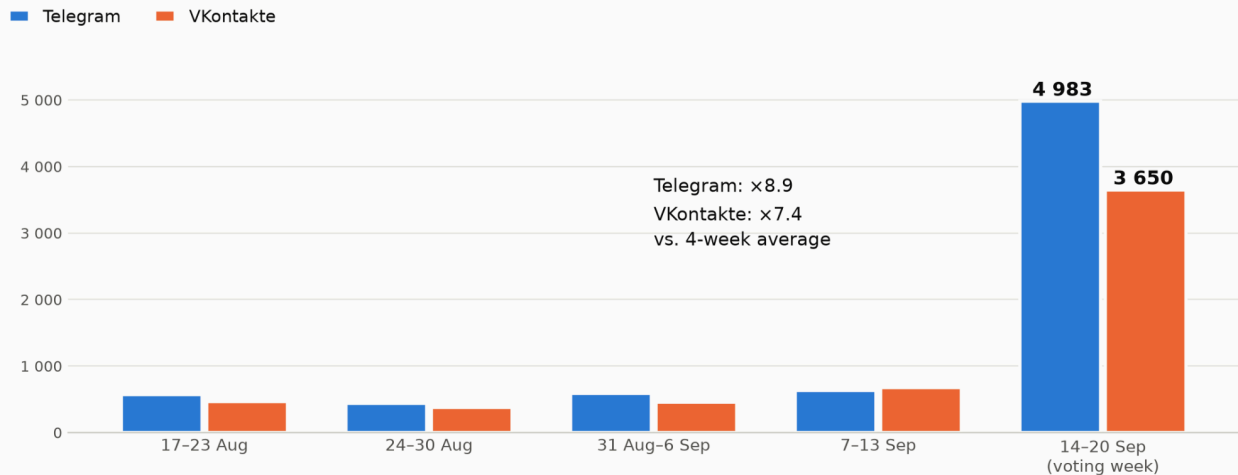
Remote Electronic Voting was used in 33 regions, 32 of which used the federal platform, while Moscow used a separate system. The main problem with electronic voting is whether the entire path from the expression of the voter's will to the final protocol can be independently verified. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation declared [the impossibility of verifying the results](#) of Remote Electronic Voting. According to interim data, federal Remote Electronic Voting without Moscow gave "United Russia" **49.14%**, and the Moscow one **52.6%**. Dmitry Nesterov, in a comment to "Agentstvo", [suggested a greater role for padding of the paper results](#) and saw no signs that federal Remote Electronic Voting had been used for falsification.

According to the report on the Central Election Commission meeting on **25 September**, [the announced turnout was](#) approximately **59.8%**, and the seats were distributed as follows: "United Russia" — 349, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation — 37, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia — 23, "New People" — 19, "A Just Russia" — 17, "Rodina" — 1, independent candidates — 4.

How did Russians discuss the elections?

Election posts spiked in the voting week

Weekly number of election-related posts in regional communities



Posts mentioning elections, voting, electoral commissions, ballots, e-voting, turnout, observers. Source: DeepRus databases.

The pre-election period

- **The agenda.** Public groups showed the candidates' "good deeds": repaired sidewalks, meetings with children, tea parties for pensioners. They published reminders of the dates and addresses of polling stations and advertised online voting, while officials urged people to turn out for the elections. Discussions rarely arose under such posts, and the "good deeds" were not taken seriously. The public recalled unfulfilled promises and asked why the problems had not been solved earlier. A prominent place among the sore points was taken by the shortage and rising price of fuel, utility tariffs, the state of the roads, low incomes and the consequences of drone attacks. These problems were often linked to an intention to vote against "United Russia".

Rostov

"I support Putin as president, go ahead and throw rotten tomatoes at me here, but not United Russia and the oligarchs. In the 2000s he admitted that the collapse of the USSR was a great catastrophe. Now think about it: if the USSR hadn't collapsed, would there be a war in Ukraine now? In Georgia, in Karabakh? And next what, Armenia? The Soviet people lived in peace from 1945 to 1991. Who are we blaming now, Putin for all our troubles??" — September 16 at 18:55, ♥4

↳ *"Viktor, of course he's not to blame! The people raised the retirement age for themselves, blocked all the services for themselves, pushed inflation to a record high, asked the developed countries for more sanctions and demanded the start of the 'Special Military Operation', and after the elections they'll start demanding a new wave of mobilization! Is that how you see it?" — September 16 at 19:07, ♥82*

↳ *"Viktor, Putin IS United Russia!" — September 16 at 19:07, ♥25*

- **The fatalism of the elections.** The comments were dominated by the sense that everything had been decided in advance and that voting does not bring a change of

power. People wrote about a "choice without a choice" and "vote or don't vote, it makes no difference", and generally did not see much point in voting as such. They ironically predicted a result of "107%" or "146%".

- **"To go or not to go".** Before the elections, the main dispute concerned whether participation made sense. Supporters of voting argued that it was necessary in order to back alternative candidates and not allow their votes to be used in favor of the authorities. Most often people called for voting for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, "New People", the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and "Yabloko". Some of these calls had a distinctly protest character: to support anyone but "United Russia". Opponents considered participation meaningless because of the absence of fair competition and expected falsifications. There were demands to bring the "against all" option back to the ballot. Distrust of all the parties on offer was also voiced.

Samara

"What's the point of going if United Russia will just draw itself 107%" — September 16 at 18:52, ♥143

Altai Krai

"We call the population of Ukraine 'Nazis', a country we ourselves attacked under the pretext of 'liberation', and we occupy the territories of a country foreign to us.

But we don't stop to think that something bad is happening in our own country with this putin. We ourselves have repressions like in Hitler's Germany, they put people away for 15 years for words, there is no dissent, exactly like in Nazi Germany, and now the country has also turned into a one-party system, just like in Nazi Germany (there the Nazi party ran things, and here united russia has been in power for 26 years) after they removed the 'Yabloko' party, the only anti-war party. Now all that's left are putin's pocket parties, which support the course of putin and united russia, namely the country's slide into the abyss and totalitarianism. Friends, everyone who reads this, wake up, tell everyone that this putin is leading us somewhere wrong, just as hitler in his time led the world to catastrophe." — September 16 at 16:58, ♥5

Rostov

"You 100% have to go, it takes 15 minutes. Don't see it as an election, but as a way to show the authorities that you are unhappy with the current state of affairs. They'll pad the numbers for themselves anyway, but they'll see the real figures" — September 18 at 20:33, ♥27

Altai Republic

"I don't trust any of these candidates, let alone the parties. Thanks for the invitation 😊" — September 8 at 9:53, ♥3

- **The income contrast.** An important place in the pre-election discussions was taken up by contrasting the rising cost of petrol, utility tariffs and people's own salaries with the declared incomes of officials. Users considered officials detached from the people.

The voting days

- **What was posted?** During the elections, public groups covered turnout, officials voting, the work of polling stations and festive election stories (Spider-Man at polling stations in Makhachkala, Tyumen and Temporarily Occupied Luhansk, free concerts by Grigory Leps in Tver and Sergey Lazarev in Smolensk, lotteries and quizzes for voters).
- **How did people react?** In the comments, people mocked photos of officials at ballot boxes and posts about "foreign observers", joking that the most interesting part would begin at night. The public was particularly stung by the fact that those who voted on the first day were called "the most conscientious". In response, people wrote that the early turnout could have been linked not to conscientiousness but to forced voting by public sector employees and military personnel. After the first day, more than a third of voters had cast their ballots in Tyumen, and about 9% in Kaliningrad Oblast. The festive decoration of the elections irritated the public, because in the same regions City Day and 9 May celebrations had been canceled "for security reasons", so the elections were most often called a "circus".

Kemerovo Oblast (reaction to the second day of turnout)

*"No matter who I ask, nobody went, yet the percentage is so high 🤔
I won't be surprised if by the end of this show the turnout ends up at 120%" —
September 20 at 6:06, ♥29*

- **Online voting.** On the voting days, people were reminded of the option of remote electronic voting. The option was both praised for its convenience and met with doubts about its reliability.
- **Administrative resources.** In the regions, people discussed public sector employees being forced to vote. They mentioned demands to register in the Remote Electronic Voting system in Dzerzhinsk, voting under the supervision of coordinators in Yaroslavl Oblast, and demands to send photos of completed ballots in Krasnoyarsk Krai.

Murmansk

*"So the most 'conscientious' ones are the ones who were herded in to sign? 🤔🤔🤔
public sector employees, the military and so on, yeah right" — September 19 at
11:51, ♥57*

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

"All public sector employees were unofficially 'asked' to vote on Friday on a voluntary-compulsory basis, even though under Article 32 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation this is not a legal obligation. Hence the good statistics on the first day of the elections. This is not an election, but a show with pressure on the population, and above all about reporting back to the okrug as quickly as possible." — September 19 at 22:46, ♥10

- **Falsification.** There are many accusations of falsification, and some of them are based on personal observations. People described a ballot box that was half full

before opening, a passport that had "already voted" and voter data printed out in advance. Reports of violations appeared primarily in the comments rather than in posts.

St. Petersburg

"What are they thinking, the people whose hands are used to do this trash? Don't they have children? Or are they so sure that their souls won't have to answer for all the evil they commit on earth?" — September 20 at 21:11, ♥64

Perm

"This is exactly why the United Russia members win elections. Because of commission members like these." — September 20 at 13:27, ♥50

Dagestan

"Elections in Chechnya are like elections in North Korea 😊"

Samara

"How convenient: declare all the ballots invalid, when it was known that people would go to vote against United Russia precisely on paper and on the last day." — September 20 at 18:19, ♥73

Reaction to the results

- **Reports of the results** most often provoked sarcasm, disappointment and accusations of falsification. The question kept coming up of who had voted for "United Russia" if, supposedly, none of the commenters' acquaintances supported it. Possible ballot stuffing, administrative resources and the lack of transparency in the count were mentioned. Alongside this there were isolated positive assessments of "United Russia", denials of the accusations and comments from people who called themselves observers and reported that they had not noticed any ballot stuffing.

Samara

"Well, who the f... ever doubted it" — September 21 at 9:21, ♥82

Tatarstan

"Honestly, in real life I don't know a single person who supported United Russia." — September 20 at 23:29, ♥24

Kaluga Oblast

"Of course, we believe it. In 2021 United Russia got 49.82, and now, after a pile of insane laws, restrictions, rising prices and the destruction of freedom, they collected a whopping 57+. Where did all these votes come from??? Did you use everyone who died during United Russia's rule to vote for them?" — September 21 at 10:32, ♥19

Irkutsk Oblast

"It would be interesting to know the real results, without fakery and rigging." — September 21 at 2:50, ♥9

↳ "Ksenia, I worked as an observer in these elections. These are the real results." —
September 21 at 3:01, ♥5

↳ "Alexey, it's useless, you can't prove anything to them. And the loudest shouting about
'fakery and rigging' will come from those who didn't go to the elections at all." —
September 21 at 3:30, ♥6

↳ "Alexey, I was an observer too, and I don't understand at what point anything could
even be rigged. And I agree with Andrey - the ones most outraged are those who don't go.
And smart people would also analyze the gap between United Russia and the Communist
Party of the Russian Federation and would also understand that there is no rigging. The
gap is shrinking every time, after all 🙄" — September 21 at 4:01, ♥5

↳ "Andrey, just because you were at one polling station and there was no ballot stuffing
there doesn't mean there wasn't any at all." — September 21 at 5:10

Krasnoyarsk Krai

"It got that because there were more stuffed ballots than people who came to vote, and
the dead probably voted too. People filmed so many lies during these elections 🙄" —
September 21 at 8:40, ♥16

Novosibirsk Oblast

"Shitty lies. What the hell 19% for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation??? Far
more people voted for them, I saw it myself.
The United Russia members rigged it as usual" — September 21 at 10:24, ♥34

Murmansk

"Not a single person I know voted for United Russia or Kusaiko, but the ones who didn't
take part in the elections make me sad" — September 22 at 12:34, ♥152

Temporarily Occupied Crimea

"No matter who you ask, nobody voted for United Russia, but the result shows something
completely different.
Elections without a choice" — September 21 at 6:38, ♥29

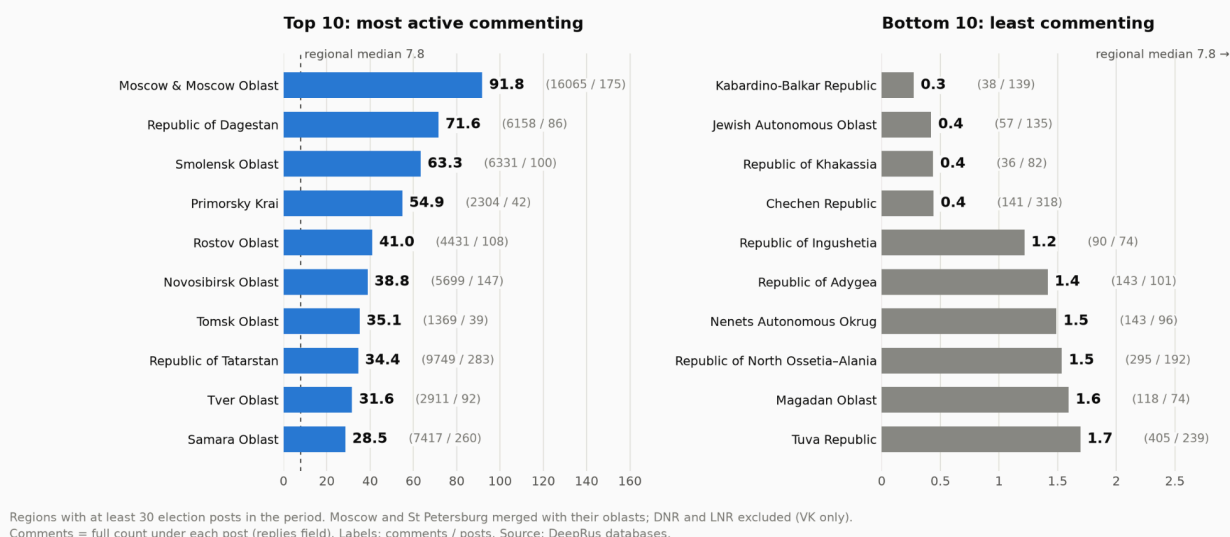
- **In the regions with the lowest "United Russia" result**, part of the audience took the figures as a reason for regional pride. Vologda and Arkhangelsk Oblasts made the list of regions where the party performed worst, and under this news there appeared comments of a kind almost absent in the rest of the country. There, the result was called proof of the region's "different" character.
- **Expectations.** After the vote, people shared expectations that the quality of life would decline. Commenters predicted rising prices, higher tariffs and worsening fuel problems, and linked the victory of "United Russia" to the continuation of the "special operation". Some participants wrote that they no longer see any point in going to the polls.

Perm

"Complete disappointment, it's scary to imagine what awaits us now after
elections like these." — September 20 at 23:50, ♥85

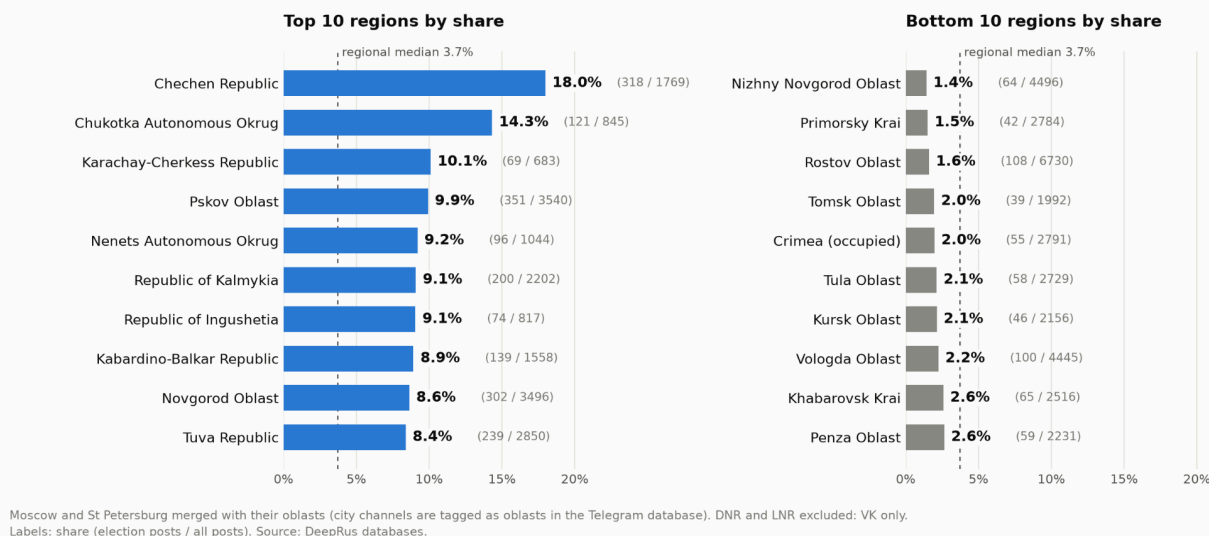
Temporarily Occupied Crimea*"The lights haven't come back on**Still no petrol**No mobilization yet**Crazy inflation**Thieves keep stealing....**Nothing new." — September 21 at 9:00, ♥55***Lipetsk Oblast***"The population will get a little poorer, Pu's friends a little richer. Russia will gain more enemies. Otherwise everything is as before, just a bit worse.**I think it would be fair if all the new taxes and levies that appear (and they will definitely appear) were paid only by those who voted for UNITED RUSSIA." —**September 21 at 9:58, ♥37**↳ "Alexey, and mobilization isn't needed either. See, 57% are volunteers." —**September 21 at 10:35, ♥21***Lipetsk Oblast***"These elections will go down in history. But not as a triumph for United Russia, rather as the last ones it took part in. And also for the amount of pressure and machinations. It's a pity the people were not allowed to make their choice peacefully." — September 21 at 14:38, ♥11***Activity in the regions****How many comments an election post drew on average**

Average comments per election post, regional Telegram and VKontakte communities, 1–20 September 2026



Where elections took the largest and smallest share of the feed

Share of election posts among all posts in regional communities, 1–20 September 2026 (Telegram and VKontakte combined)



The high share of posts about the elections in Chechnya is partly explained by the structure of the public groups under monitoring. They were dominated by official communities that regularly published standard reports on the progress of the vote.

Conclusions

The elections added no trust either in the authorities or in the electoral process. Instead, they cemented the conviction that nothing depends on the voter. The discontent is widespread, but passive.

2. The week in Russian regional "VKontakte" and "Telegram"

Top discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

1. *A record drone attack on Moscow on the last night of voting*

On the night of 19 to 20 September, Moscow went through one of the largest drone attacks. It was reported that air defense shot down more than 1,600 drones, and the Moscow oil refinery in Kapotnya was damaged. Sobyenin called the attack an attempt to disrupt the elections, and regional public groups actively repeated this version. During the week, strikes hit more than just Moscow. An oil refinery was damaged in Yaroslavl, and Rostov, Nizhnekamsk, Bataysk and Taganrog were also attacked.

Overall, the topic of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle attacks remained very widespread. On Telegram there were 2,335 posts in 79 regions, on VKontakte 1,323 posts in 78 regions. The attack on Moscow itself was discussed separately in dozens of regions.

This time, the regions' resentment toward Moscow and a sense of a kind of justice over the shelling of the capital became especially noticeable in the discussions. People wrote that the capital had finally felt what other regions had long been living with. Far from everyone accepted the version about an attempt to disrupt the elections. It was mocked because the main attack took place at night, when no voting was under way. Because of this, part of the audience saw the official explanation as a political interpretation rather than a convincing account of events.

Overall, the public doubted the reports on the consequences of the attacks and recalled earlier statements by the authorities that later turned out to be untrue. There were also demands to end the war and the usual dispute in these threads with those who blame Ukraine and Europe.

In Yaroslavl, the story of a man who was refused a payment after his mother was killed in an attack became a topic of discussion. Comments accusing the authorities, who are "busy with the elections", gathered hundreds of likes.

2. *The fuel crisis continues*

The petrol shortage, which has been dragging on for several weeks, is being discussed in more than 80 regions. At the start of the week, the situation in St. Petersburg was particularly noticeable: queues at filling stations had already begun to disrupt traffic. Groups posted lists of filling stations where 92-octane petrol could still be found, and private fuel sellers even appeared in the queues. The governor there has already admitted that fuel supplies will not return quickly. In Astrakhan, petrol was dispensed according to even and odd license plate numbers, and in Temporarily Occupied Crimea only 94 filling

stations were operating on 20 September. After the attack on Kapotnya, "Gazpromneft" lowered the petrol sales limit in Moscow to 30 liters. The very next day, people began writing about new disruptions in Kaluga.

This week, the fuel topic almost completely merged with the election topic. When the petrol situation improved slightly in Perm and a number of other regions a few days before the vote, locals immediately treated it with distrust. In the comments, they wrote that the authorities had simply decided to show a temporary improvement before the elections.

Chelyabinsk

*"Just wait, guys, the elections will be over and there'll be no petrol again 😂😂😂😂" —
September 15 at 12:37, ♥75*

The shortage is increasingly linked directly to the strikes on oil refineries, so commenters readily mock official reports about successfully repelled attacks. If most of the drones really are shot down, they ask, why is there less petrol at filling stations afterwards, and why are new limits being introduced?

The discussions continue to sort out who can skip the queue to get to another pump, how many liters one person can take and whether veterans are entitled to separate service.

3. Mobilization denied again

On the first day of voting, Peskov stated that there would be no hidden mobilization after the elections and that there were no plans to call up 300,000 people by the end of the year. His words quickly spread through regional channels and were circulated especially actively in Moscow and Rostov Oblasts and Tatarstan. Two days later, a post appeared in Smolensk Oblast claiming that people were allegedly being registered for military service right after voting remotely.

In the comments, people recalled the authorities' previous promises regarding the retirement age, the Constitution and mobilization in 2022, and for this reason did not find Peskov's new assurance convincing. They believe that the more actively the authorities deny something, the more suspicion it arouses. Then they brought up Peskov's family and asked why members of the elite do not go to fight themselves. The public assumed that nothing would happen before the voting was over, and that all the unpopular decisions could begin right after it.

Overall, interest in the "denials" declined compared with the previous week. However, the pattern of judging new assurances by the experience of the authorities' previous promises, which, in people's view, can no longer be trusted, remained. Last week there were comments in support of the view that mobilization is "an enemy fake". This week there were practically no such comments anymore.

4. Double standards of access to communications

At an international youth festival in Yekaterinburg, foreign participants were given SIM cards without any restrictions and with access to social networks blocked in Russia, while

Russians themselves live with blocked Telegram calls and warnings about possible internet shutdowns during the elections. The reaction was negative. People were outraged that for some freedom is real, while for others it exists only on paper.

Methodology

What this project is. Systematic monitoring of sentiment in Russian regions — with a focus on critical and negative posts as an indicator of what irritates, frightens or outrages people. The conclusions rest on two parallel sources from monitoring regional VKontakte groups and Telegram.

VKontakte and Telegram. Automated data collection in regional Russian communities on VKontakte (536 groups) and Telegram (428 channels) — regional news channels, local public groups, oblast media, local "chat bots" with audiences ranging from several thousand to hundreds of thousands of subscribers. Coverage — all Russian regions and the occupied territories of Ukraine. Observations by regional analysts were additionally used.

Quotes in the report text are given verbatim.