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Elections in the Russian Federation

2018 Presidential Election

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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March 14, 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Russian elections authorities as of March 14, 2018 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

The Russian Federation presidential election will be held on March 18, 2018. The Council of Federation set the date based on a last-minute decision on December 15, 2017 and announced the date on December 18. The date and relatively short turnaround time for campaigns may have caused difficulties for many election campaign participants, particularly the shortening of the period for collecting signatures.

In the previous presidential election held on March 4, 2012, incumbent president Vladimir Putin won in the first round with 63.6 percent of the vote. Following the last [State Duma election](#) held on September 18, 2016, six political parties are represented. The ruling United Russia, which Putin represented, obtained 343 seats out of a 450-member Parliament and subsequently formed a government. The remaining seats were split between the Communist Party of the Russian Federation with 42 seats, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia with 39 seats, Fair Russia with 23 seats and the Civic Platform *Rodina* and a self-nominated candidate who hold one seat each.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Citizens will be electing the president of the country. The position of president was established in Russia in 1991. Since then, presidential elections have been held six times: in 1991, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012. Only once, in 1996, it took two rounds to determine the winner. In 1991, the country's president was elected for five years. In 1993, a new constitution was adopted, which reduced the presidential term to four years (the new rules were applied for the first time in the 1996 presidential election). Constitutional amendments that came into force on December 31, 2008 [stipulated that the presidential term in office](#) would be six years starting in 2012.

The president is directly elected in a single nationwide constituency, including voters abroad, for a six-year term. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the valid votes cast, a second round takes place within three weeks between the two candidates who gained the highest numbers of votes. Any citizen of the Russian Federation not younger than 35 years of age who has legally resided in the country on a permanent basis for not less than 10 years may be elected president. This legislative restriction may deprive Russian citizens of their right to stand because the need to have a valid residence permit might be perceived as excessive. Potential candidates can be nominated by groups of voters or by political parties.

The election campaign starts on the day of nomination of candidates and ends one day before Election Day. The 2018 presidential campaign officially began on December 18, 2017.

According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), out of 70 hopefuls who expressed interest in competing for the Russian presidency during the run-up to the race, only 36 individuals were ultimately nominated. After [verifying the signatures](#), the CEC [registered eight candidates](#) for the presidential election.

Compared to the 2012 presidential election, the [significant reduction in the required number](#) of signatures to be collected by candidates in support of their nomination (down from two million to

100,000 for candidates nominated by non-parliamentary parties, and to 300,000 for self-nominated candidates) is a welcome change, albeit still high. The candidates for the 2018 presidential election were required to submit the collected signatures to the CEC by January 31. Candidates nominated by parliamentary parties are exempt from the requirement to collect and submit signatures. As such, the CEC registered two candidates immediately after parliamentary parties nominated them. These include the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and the candidate from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Pavel Grudinin.

The six [candidates who submitted the required documents](#) and voter signatures to the CEC for registration are: incumbent President Vladimir Putin, who is taking part in the race as an independent candidate¹; Yabloko Liberal Party candidate Grigory Yavlinsky; the presidential business ombudsman and leader of the Party of Growth, Boris Titov; TV celebrity Ksenia Sobchak, who was nominated by the Civic Initiative Party; leader of the Communists of Russia Party (not to be confused with the CPRF), Maksim Suraikin; and head of the Russian All People's Union, Sergei Baburin.

Since 1991, only two women have run for president. In 2000, the President of the Bureau of the All-Russia Public Movement for Civic Honor Ella Pamfilova (who now heads the Central Election Commission) gained 1.01 percent of the vote, coming in fifth among 11 candidates. Co-chairperson of the Union of Right Forces party Irina Khakamada [took fifth place](#) out of six in 2004, receiving 3.84 percent of the vote. Sobchak becomes the third woman to run for the president.

Candidates holding civil service positions are required to step down from office to run for president. Candidates who hold elected federal or municipal positions are not obliged to step down from office. President Vladimir Putin is [not obliged to take leave](#) because he holds a high-ranking state post.

What is the political system?

The 1993 constitution states that Russia is a democratic and federal state with a republican form of government based on the rule of law. According to the 1993 constitution, state power in the Russian Federation is exercised by the president, the Federal Assembly (Parliament of the Russian Federation), the Government of the Russian Federation, and the courts.

The president serves as the head of the state with a wide range of powers and responsibilities. Legislative power is exercised by the Federal Assembly, a bicameral body consisting of the [Council of the Federation](#) (upper house) and the State Duma (lower house). Six political parties are represented in the

¹ Incumbent president Vladimir Putin, attending an annual end-of-year press conference held on December 14, 2017, announced that he would run for president in 2018 as an independent candidate. Putin said: "Definitely, I hope that I will be supported by some popular movements, parties or any other groups that share my views and that endorse my views; so I really rely on broad support from our people." Although Putin was consistently a candidate of the ruling United Russia in previous elections, he didn't expand on the reason for this decision to run as an independent. This decision might be a signal of a break with the United Russia party, which has been down in the public opinion polls of late. According to data from the independent Russian polling firm Levada Center showing the decline of the party's popularity, Putin may wish to distance himself ahead of the election. For more, please see: <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/12/14/putin-to-run-as-an-independent-in-2018-election.htm>.

State Duma following the last parliamentary elections in September 2016.² Executive power is exercised by the [Government of the Russian Federation](#). The members of the government are the chairperson of the government (prime minister), the deputy chairperson of the government (deputy prime minister), and federal ministers. The prime minister is appointed by the president with the consent of the State Duma.

How is campaign financing regulated?

Campaigns can be funded from candidates' resources, loans and contributions received from individuals. According to Russian legislation, the [limit for campaign expenditure](#) for the presidential election amounts to 400 million rubles (approximately \$7,036,800 USD). Candidates are also obliged to appoint authorized representatives for financial matters and open a dedicated electoral fund account. Candidates are obliged to submit financial reports to the Central Election Commission twice, the first time with the submission of the registration documents and a final financial report within 30 days of the official publication of the election results.

Who can vote in the country?

Citizens over 18 years of age by Election Day, except those serving a prison term or recognized by a court as "incapacitated" [sic], are eligible to vote. Voter registration is passive, and voter lists are compiled based on a registration system linked to the citizens' place of residence.

How many registered voters are there?

As of January 1, 2018, out of 144 million people, the Central Election Commission reports 108,968,869 registered voters living in the Russian Federation and 1,889,359 registered abroad.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The election will be administered by the Central Election Commission (CEC), subject election commissions (SECs), territorial election commissions (TECs), and precinct election commissions (PECs).³ The commissions act on a permanent basis.⁴ The tenure of all electoral bodies is five years. Decisions of the higher-level election commissions are binding for the lower-level ones. The CEC is composed of 15 members: 5 members are appointed by the State Duma, 5 members are appointed by the Council of the Federation, and 5 members are appointed by the president of the Russian Federation.

² There are 67 registered political parties. However, several opposition initiatives remain unregistered.

³ The CEC is based in Moscow. The SECs cover the area of the federal republics (oblasts and autonomous republics). In the main cities within the SECs' territory are the TECs, which oversee their designated PECs. Every republic has its election webpage accessible from the CEC's website. For more, please see: <http://cikrf.ru/eng/election-commissions/>.

⁴ At least half of the members of SECs, TECs and PECs should represent eligible political parties, while state or municipal officials should not constitute more than half of the commissions. In addition, election commissions and various public and voter associations are also entitled to nominate commission members. For more, please see: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia/374137?download=true>.

The chairperson of the CEC is elected by secret ballot. On March 28, 2016, members of the CEC elected from their composition Ella Pamfilova as chairperson, Nikolay Bulaev as deputy chairperson, and Maya Grishina as secretary. CEC Chairperson Ella Pamfilova is a generally well-regarded election professional who has worked to modernize Russian elections. Among other duties, the CEC is responsible for training lower-level election commissions as well as for providing guidance to those bodies. The primary role of the CEC is to:

- Organize preparation and conduct of the election;
- Render legal, methodological, organizational and technical assistance to election commissions;
- Manage activities of lower-level election commissions to ensure the uniform use of the automated state system of voter registration and vote counting and results transmission, known as *GAS Vybory*;
- Register candidates;
- Register groups of voters formed to support self-nomination of candidates;
- Consider complaints concerning decisions and actions of election commissions; and
- Establish the results of the election of the president of the Russian Federation.

The SEC may form one or several TECs for management preparation and conduct of the election. TECs consist of no less than five and not more than nine members. The number of PEC members depends on the number of voters registered in the territory of the election precinct. Information regarding the TECs and PECs can be found through the links on the CEC website.

Among other duties, a TEC primarily exercises control over electoral preparations, forms PECs and coordinates their work, prepares voters' lists, and ensures that the *GAS Vybory* is used in relevant territories. PECs inform the population about the address of the PECs, prepare polling stations, inform voters about registered candidates, organize voting in the election precinct, count votes, and within the scope of its powers consider complaints.

The CEC closely co-operates with the Russian Fund of Training in Electoral Technologies Affiliated with the CEC (RCIT). The CEC established this body in 1994 for the purpose of ensuring a smooth process in the conduct of elections and referenda. A branch of the RCIT is open in the Republic of Crimea. The RCIT:

- Provides legal training to election bodies, including voters themselves;
- Prepares and disseminates printed and audio-visual materials; and
- Studies and improves electoral technologies.

This [campaign will be conducted](#) by the CEC, 85 SECs, 2,777 TECs with 27,000 members, and approximately 97,000 PECS with 850,000 members.

For the 2018 presidential election, the CEC and the RCIT have prepared information and explanatory materials for voters, PEC members, and media.⁵



Example of voter materials prepared by the CEC and RCIT.

According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission's interim report, released on March 2, 2018, PECs in some regions are engaged in door-to-door visits with the purpose of informing voters of the upcoming elections. In addition, in some regions, governors and SECs have [organized competitions](#) among PECs and have offered monetary rewards for PECs with the best performance and highest voter turnout.

Where and how will voters cast their ballots on Election Day?

An election precinct (polling station) must be formed by the head of the local administration and the relevant territorial election commission ahead of Election Day. In exceptional cases, a special polling station may be formed in a military unit, on ships, or at polar stations (for more, please see [“How many polling places are set up on Election Day?”](#)).

⁵ A brochure and the booklet are posted on the website of the RCIT. For more, please see: <http://www.rcoit.ru/e-library/books/3820/>.

The head of local administration will publish a list of precincts/polling stations and their locations no later than 40 days before Election Day. Voters can get information using the “Найди свой участок” (find your polling station) search system on the [official website](#) of the Central Election Commission.

There is a maximum of 3,000 voters per polling station. Polling stations must have a hall to set up ballot boxes, booths and other places for secret voting. Inside or directly in front of the polling station, precinct election commissions set up a bulletin board for displaying the data of the candidates and their party affiliation, among other pieces of information.

Paper ballots are used in Russian Federation elections, though some locations will have touch screen voting. In early February 2018, the [ballot design was to be finalized](#). All registered candidates will appear in alphabetical order on the ballot. The ballot paper must contain the full name of the candidate, year of birth, their place of residence, occupation, and party affiliation.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

A total of approximately 97,000 polling stations will open across the country at 8:00 a.m. and close at 8:00 p.m. According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), around 1,271 polling stations will be set up in Crimea and 400 polling stations will be set up in Russian Federation embassies and consulates worldwide.

The CEC approved a new process for including voters in the voter roll at the “place of current residence.” This procedure replaced absentee voter certificates. Following legislative amendments from June 2017, voters who wish to vote in a place other than their place of residence can apply to any territorial election commission (TEC), to centers of state and municipal services, or online for inclusion in the list of voters in a polling station of their choice starting from 45 days before Election Day up until five days prior to the election. Following this period, and up until 2:00 p.m. on the day prior to the election, such requests can only be submitted at the precinct election commission (PEC) of the voter’s place of residence by completing an application form.

All voters who submit such an application are included in a single database, called the GAS *Vyborny* system, which will ensure that these voters are removed from the voter roll at their place of permanent registration. Voters lists are prepared by TEC no later than 11 days before Election Day. Voter lists should be delivered to PECs 10 days before Election Day and, in the case of early voting, no later than 21 days before Election Day.

Voting outside polling stations via mobile ballot box is conducted on Election Day. A voter who cannot arrive for a good reason at the premises, must send a written application or personally visit a PEC and make an oral statement. The appeal could be submitted to a PEC from March 8 through March 18. PEC members must make a proper arrangement to [ensure this mobile balloting is available](#).

In places, where voters stay temporarily (hospitals, sanatorium, airports), places where people suspected of or charged with a crime are held in custody, in remote areas, on ships, at polar stations and at the premises of diplomatic and consular missions, PECs may be formed by TECs in cooperation with local authorities.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Yes. According to the [Central Election Commission](#), 400 polling stations will be set up abroad. Information on polling stations established outside Russia is posted on websites of the relevant diplomatic missions and consular offices.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

A voter who cannot independently sign a ballot paper or fill out a ballot paper due to a disability or health condition may use the assistance of another voter who is not a member of the election commission, a registered candidate, his trustee, an authorized representative for financial matters, an authorized representative or an agent of a political party that nominated a registered candidate, an observer, or a foreign (international) observer. A voter must verbally inform the election commission of her or his intention to use the help of another person whose personal information is noted. Visually-impaired voters will be able to cast their votes secretly using a Braille ballot sheet. Since 2014, it has been [required](#) that [all polling stations are wheelchair-accessible](#).

What technology will be used?

In order to monitor voting, counting and tabulation, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has increased the number of polling stations equipped with closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, covering approximately 80 percent of voters. There has been some concern raised regarding the protection of secrecy of the vote with these cameras.

Two types of technology were piloted during the 2012 presidential election; the first was a touch-screen system for voting, and the second an optical scanner for counting and tabulating paper ballots. Thus, voters in Russia, depending on their particular polling station, could either vote via touch screen or optically-scanned paper ballot. In the 2018 election, approximately 30 percent of polling stations will use the optical scan equipment, whereas in others only traditional paper and standard ballot boxes will be used. These devices are intended to help count votes quickly and transfer results to the CEC via a system called GAS *Vybory*. The aim is to ensure the inclusiveness of information coming from the polling stations.

For this election, the CEC will employ the [state automated system of the Russian Federation](#), known as the GAS *Vybory*. GAS *Vybory* is a database developed for the storage and exchange of information between election commissions, which serves as a medium for voter registration, preparation of the voters' list, the establishment of election results on a local and national basis, and for the quick receipt, transmission and processing of information. Turnout figures and preliminary and final voting results are entered into GAS *Vybory* and are readily accessible to internet users.

For the first time, the [technology will be applied](#) not only in precincts, but also in territorial election commissions, which will allow the process of voting and counting to enter the protocols in the GAS *Vybory* and be public and accessible to any internet user. At the same time, the candidate and the political party that nominated the candidate will receive full access to video records from all polling

stations and will be able to appeal the results of voting from any polling station and the results of the election as a whole, if necessary.

One of the innovations of the electoral legislation is the use of machine-readable code in the preparation of protocols of PECs. After the voting ends, PECs will have a unique QR-code to be identified by a special scanner. This will help to avoid mistakes in feeding data into GAS *Vybory*.

A new mobile phone app was created for voters to check and/or confirm voter registration information. As of this writing, four million voters used it.

How will voters be ensured access to information about the election?

The Central Election Commission's (CEC) [Press Center](#) is responsible for informing citizens about the activities of the CEC in preparation for the upcoming election. The Press Center should provide real-time data about the voting process, its preliminary results, voter turnout updates, and address legal questions. Federal Law mandates that national TV must allocate the CEC at least 15 minutes of free air time to provide informational updates.

The CEC also maintains an [Information and Resource Center](#), which provides voters and other participants in the electoral process with information on the elections through a telephone hotline, which will have expanded hours during the month of March. Information available includes how to register as a voter for the election, current electoral disputes, how to contact election commissions, and information about a current election campaign.

Pre-election campaigning on the channels of TV and radio broadcasting organizations, in periodicals and in online publications begins 28 days before the Election day and ends at 00:00 local time one day before the voting day. Any election campaigning is prohibited on the voting day and a day before.

Campaigning in the mass media will consist of [televised debates and candidate election videos](#). Free air-time on state-owned media will be granted only to registered candidates. In case of illness or performance of official duties, candidates can be substituted by authorized representatives. All candidates can buy paid political advertisements out of their private campaign funds.

On January 21 2018, the CEC began accepting applications for the accreditation of media representatives to be present at polling stations to cover the voting and vote count/announcement of results. The CEC will grant the media the right to cover early and repeat voting through this accreditation as well.

From February 12 to March 10, the CEC accredited representatives of mass media to attend briefings on March 18 and 19. A separate accreditation is required for visiting polling stations and attending the announcement of preliminary and final election results. To receive accreditation, representatives of the Russian media must submit required documentation to the CEC.

Five federal state TV channels (*Rossiya-1*, *Rossiya-24*, Channel One, TV *Tsentr* and Public Television of Russia) and three national radio networks (Radio of Russia, *Mayak* and *Vesti FM*) will provide presidential candidates with free airtime.

Who is managing security on Election Day?

Russia's National Guard, also known as *Rosgvardiya*, will manage the security of polling stations and surrounding areas together with the Interior Ministry and private security companies.

Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

The counting process will take place at the polling stations when polls close.

Precinct election commission (PEC) members will conduct the vote count. After the completion of the counting process, PEC officers pack the ballots and sort them in accordance with the votes received by each registered candidate. PECs must sign the hand-written protocol (or use technical vote counting facilities or an e-voting complex), and pass it on to the relevant territorial election commission (TEC) without any delay.

After collecting all the protocols and results, TECs sum up data, and, no later than three days after Election Day, release the voting results for the respective territories. If the TEC has the automation facilities of GAS *Vybory* available, it may use the system to double-check the data of the protocols. Otherwise, the TEC members check the protocol for unnoticed errors.

The TECs also prepare protocols⁶ and pass them on to the subject election commissions (SECs). SECs release the voting results and deliver the signed protocol to the Central Election Commission no later than on the fifth day after the election.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they gain accreditation?

Russia legislation provides for observation of the electoral process by representatives of electoral contestants, media, international observers and observers appointed by the Civic Chamber. The Civic Chamber (“Общественная палата” in Russian) is a consultative civil society institution with 168 members created in 2005 to analyze draft legislation and monitor the activities of the Parliament and other government bodies. It has a role similar to an oversight committee and has consultative powers.

According to the law, representatives of electoral contestants, media, international observers and observers appointed by the Civic Chamber are allowed to observe the entire electoral process. In addition, each candidate [can also appoint up to 600 proxies](#), and a political party that nominates a candidate up to 100.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on February 5 to observe the presidential elections following an invitation from the

⁶ Besides protocols, the summary table of voting results for the given territory must be attached to each protocol.

Central Election Commission based on the recommendation of a needs assessment mission conducted between December 6-9, 2017. The EOM consists of a 13-member core team based in Moscow and 60 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. In addition, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) will request the 420 short-term observers for Election Day. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM will include a media monitoring element. [Observers from the United States](#) will join the OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission for this election. There are currently 60 people from 25 countries represented in the EOM. The ODIHR and the European Union monitoring mission [will not send observers](#) to monitor voting for the presidential election in Crimea.

When will official results be announced?

Upon receiving data from lower-level commissions, the Central Election Commission (CEC) will summarize the data and release the results. The results of the presidential election will be [officially published by the CEC within three days](#) of when it signs the protocol on the results.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

The Central Election Commission (CEC) is responsible for registration or withdrawal of the candidates. Complaints against the CEC must be [filed with the Supreme Court](#) of the Russian Federation.

If any violations were committed in the counting of results, the superior election commission can reverse the decision of the lower-level body. After the results have been released by the superior election commission, only a court may change it. After the CEC decides on the results, a court may reverse it under the conditions set by federal law.

In the course of the election campaign, election commissions must provide a written answer to complainants within five days but no later than the day preceding Election Day. As for the complaints received on Election Day or the next day, the election commissions must respond "immediately" (this somewhat vague and indefinite terminology is the subject of concerns). If election commissions need an additional inquiry, the decisions must be taken within 10 days. According to federal law, election commissions may apply to law enforcement bodies and request them to carry out inquiries and address violations within five days. Appeals of decisions of the CEC on voting results, results of elections, must be submitted to the Supreme Court.

Resources

- [Central Election Commission](#)
- Central Election Commission: [Election Procedures](#)
- [Embassy of the Russian Federation, Washington D.C.](#)
- European Platform for Democratic Elections: [New Golos report on the nomination and registration of candidates for the presidential election](#)
- [Federal Law on Elections of the President](#)
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: [Assessment Mission Report, Russian Federation Presidential Election](#)
- [Russian Fund of Training in Electoral Technologies Affiliated with the Central Election Commission](#)