



The Movement for the Defense of Voters' Rights "Golos"
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Smokescreen: How pseudo-public organizations simulate civic participation in Russian elections

Investigation by the "Golos" movement

A low level of real political competition has been a marked characteristic of the 2018 presidential election campaign in the Russian Federation. The low level of political competition has largely been caused by a significant imbalance in resources that the candidates possess. Abuses of administrative resources are the most evident example. Monopoly of this resource has led to the fact that virtually the surname of only one candidate is mentioned in the reports of violations sent to the "Golos" movement by voters from all over the country. Complete administrative monopoly is a characteristic not just of the current elections, but has been a feature of practically all Russian election campaigns for many years, regardless of the candidates taking part in them.

The obvious abuse of administrative resources was a catalyst for this investigation. It is devoted to examining the use of youth organizations and associations supervised by the authorities, mainly the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs ("Rosmolodezh"), in the election campaign for the incumbent president and for simulating civic participation in election monitoring.

One of the most important features of the 2018 presidential election is the show of active involvement of the public in the election campaign. Supposed broad public participation is meant to give greater legitimacy to the electoral process, to the individual candidates' campaigns, and to the results of the election. Implementation of this strategy occurs at all stages of the election campaign—from candidate nomination, through signature collection and pre-election campaigning, to election monitoring and voting. For example, signature collection in favour of the nomination of Vladimir Putin was carried out by the public movement "Volunteers of Victory" and the activists of the "Student Campaign Headquarters" supporting Vladimir Putin. Not only political parties supported Putin's nomination, but also many public organizations and movements whose representatives were included in the list of authorized representatives of the candidate. The culmination of public participation in the 2018 election campaign ostensibly planned by the authorities should be large-scale "public monitoring," which, according to the recently adopted amendments to the legislation, can now be carried out by public chambers that can send observers to polling stations. In the regions, there are reports of thousands of observers who are prepared to go to polling

stations, mostly from the so-called "network NGOs": organizations of veterans, students, trade unions, volunteers, etc., representing the interests of certain social groups.

At the same time, these public organizations and movements appear to receive substantial state support—both in the form of direct financing, and by being allowed to use state and municipal property, by receiving information support, and through payment of salaries to their regional coordinators who work for budgetary institutions, different forms of authorities, and the local self-government.

The simulation of the political process in Russia today looks like a conscious strategy whose goal is to replace real political activity in elections. Such substitution can become a serious challenge not only for the institution of elections, but for the entire civil society in the country.

Conclusions

- The “Volunteers of Victory” organization, which collected signatures in support of Vladimir Putin's nomination as a presidential candidate, receives significant financial and other material state support. The most large-scale activities and events of the organization are held with the direct participation of federal agencies. In the regions, the “Volunteers of Victory” are primarily based at budgetary institutions, including universities, or other public organizations that have state support, where their coordinators receive salaries. **Essentially, the crucial infrastructure for the “Volunteers of Victory” organization is created at the expense of budget funds to provide salaries, office space, and office equipment.**

- In at least 40 out of 76 regions where “Volunteers of Victory” have branches, coordinators of the organization are employees of government bodies, the local government, or budgetary institutions. And almost in all the cases, the official duties of these employees are directly related to supervision of volunteerism, youth policy, or patriotic education. **Such support from the state budgets of all levels in effect amounts to indirect state funding for the election campaign of the candidate supported by the organization. It violates the principles of candidate equality and political neutrality of officials working in government, local government, or budget organizations.**

- **“Volunteers of Victory” are closely connected with other youth and school associations controlled by the structures of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs and by regional and local administrations:** "Russian Movement of Schoolchildren," "Russian Youth Union," "Russian Student Groups," trade union activists, participants in the “Snow Troopers” events, youth parliaments, “Young Lawyers of Russia,” and others. Often, they have common founders, and activists are simultaneously members of several organizations.

- “Student Unions of Putin's Supporters” and the para-state election observation associations draw on human resources from the same aforementioned organizations.

- The activities of “Volunteers of Victory,” which has a legal registration and formally declared its participation in the election campaign on behalf of one of the presidential candidates, are subject to the restrictions established in the electoral law, which do not allow legal persons to perform free work or provide free services to candidates.

- Youth para-state election monitoring organizations perform solely the function of creating the illusion of mass monitoring at polling stations. The real curators and public speakers are their "older comrades" from other organizations that are closely related to each other. Most of them have service experience in law enforcement agencies in officer positions. Organizations of veterans of law enforcement agencies have also signed agreements with public chambers to send observers to elections in many regions.

- **Yet another confirmation of the simulational nature of the planned monitoring** are agreements between regional public chambers and a narrow circle of NGOs loyal to the authorities that had not previously monitored elections and that ignore professional monitoring associations.

- The totality of the organizations described above actually represent a unified system—a new reincarnation of the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations, only with a looser structure. **This system is a pseudo-public, para-bureaucratic structure that covers all the stages of the election campaign: signature collection, campaigning, and election monitoring.**

- The task of the created structure is not limited to creating a simulation of broad and active public support for a specific candidate and legitimization of election results through pseudo-social monitoring. The organizations described herein are also used by their supervisors for "hostile takeovers" of already existing public initiatives.

Signature Collection

Organizational Structure

According to federal electoral legislation, any funds spent on achieving a desired outcome during an election campaign, including signature collection, must come out of the candidate's election fund. Violation of this provision in excess of 5% of the limit of the election fund (i.e. 20 million rubles), results in the cancellation of the candidate's registration and his or her removal from the election.

According to representatives of Vladimir Putin's election campaign, they collected [1.6 million signatures in support of Putin](#). At the same time, according to the Central Election Commission of Russia, by February 13, only a little more than 5 million rubles were spent on signature collection, with the cost for one signature at 3.13 rubles (about 0.05 EUR), which is clearly not enough if the candidate resorts to the services of paid collectors. The discrepancy could be offset by other resources, including administrative resources.

Federal media reported that signature collection in support of the nomination of Vladimir Putin was [organized](#) by "Volunteers of Victory," whose Head Olga Amelchenkova stated that they "decided to support [Putin] again not just by talking, but by taking action," and [opened](#) signature collection points throughout the country. Anastasia Braga, regional coordinator of the organization in the Khabarovsk Territory (where the signature collecting campaign was launched), [announced](#) the start of signature collection on January 5. On January 29, the collected signatures were [handed](#) over to the CEC of Russia, also with the participation of

"Volunteers of Victory": "Young people wearing shirts with the inscription 'Putin'—the activists of 'Volunteers of Victory'—brought the boxes to the CEC. With their participation, the commissions began to unpack and then sort the subscription lists in the atrium..."

At the same time, the electoral legislation prohibits legal entities and their structural subdivisions to provide free services or perform activities in the interest of candidates. Any services must be paid for from the electoral fund of the candidate.

Such a massive activity on a nationwide scale requires, nonetheless, serious organizational, time-related, and human resources. Therefore, the contribution of the "Volunteers of Victory" movement to the election campaign of the presidential candidate requires a comprehensive analysis.

Today, human resources for the activities of the "Volunteers of Victory" come mainly from student and school associations with which the organization is closely intertwined: "Russian Movement of Schoolchildren," "Russian Youth Union," "Russian Student Squads," trade unionists, participants in the "Snow Troopers," youth parliaments, "Young Lawyers of Russia," and others.

"Interweaving" of organizations is observed not only at the federal level; it is even more noticeable at the level of ordinary activists or regional coordinators. Student activists usually interact with several such organizations. The totality of these organizations represents a new reincarnation of the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations, only with a looser structure.

For example, according to the Federal Tax Service, coordinator of the "Volunteers of Victory" in the Samara region, Sergey Andriyanov, is also the founder of the regional organization "Student Units" and "Student Council of the Samara region." Coordinator of the "Volunteers of Victory" in Tomsk, Vladimir Umirkhanov, [introduces](#) himself as the coach of the regional youth training centre of the "Russian Youth Union." Coordinators for the Ivanovo and Tambov regions, Anton Korotkov and Tigran Margaryan, respectively, are [members](#) of the youth public chamber and the youth parliament in their regions.

All these structures are traditionally used by the authorities for the purposes of PR and campaigning and are supervised by "Rosmolodezh" (Federal Agency for Youth Affairs). Therefore, it is no coincidence that the department for organizational work of the Putin campaign was [assigned](#) to Ksenia Razuvaeva, director of the Federal State Unitary Enterprise "Rospatriotcenter," which was established by "Rosmolodezh".

State Support of "Volunteers of Victory"

Federal agencies directly support the major activities and events of "Volunteers of Victory." These include not only the annual parades on "Victory Day," but other "patriotic" activities as well.

According to the television channel "Dozhd" and independent investigative journalists from the recently closed project "Russiangate," in 2016-2017 "Volunteers of Victory" [received](#) 63.3 million rubles in subsidies from the federal budget. Moreover, "Volunteers of Victory" regularly receives grants for regional projects. For example, in 2017 the Pskov branch of "Volunteers of Victory" received 2.9 million rubles from the President's grant (project [implementation](#) until November 2018). The Volgograd branch of the organization [received](#) 2.9 million rubles. Other regional branches of "Volunteers of Victory" also received state grants.

State support for "Volunteers of Victory" is not limited to grants and subsidies. In fact, "Volunteers of Victory" builds all the infrastructure necessary for their activities using state budget funds. State funds go to financing salaries of organization members, and are used to pay for premises and office equipment.

There are three main forms of "Volunteers of Victory" branches in the regions: those based at other public organizations, those based at universities, and those based at other state budgetary institutions.

State universities are basically one of the pillars of "Volunteers of Victory." A typical agreement with universities can be found on the organization's [website](#). The agreement states that the university is required to provide the organization with equipped premises and to provide methodological, organizational, and information support.

In Kaliningrad, for example, the organization established a public "Volunteers of Victory" centre at the Baltic Federal University. In late 2017, deputy pro-rector Maxim Novikov in an interview [said](#) that the rectorate managed to "integrate" the organization into the activities of the university, and called "Volunteers of Victory" the foundation for the patriotic education of his university students. Some universities went even further and appointed their employees as regional "Volunteers of Victory" coordinators. **According to electoral legislation, legal entities established by state bodies, for example state universities, are prohibited from participating in election campaigns.** Providing material support, including office space, communications equipment, and other resources, certainly falls under such participation.

In most regions, to facilitate the activities of "Volunteers of Victory," there are special positions at budgetary institutions specifically created to coordinate youth projects, and state and municipal employees are involved in the work of the organization.

For example, Governor of the Tula region Alexei Dumin [drew attention](#) in his annual message to the need to prepare for the All-Russian Forum "Volunteers of Victory," which will take place in Tula in 2018. Organization of the regional branch of the All-Russian Public Movement "Volunteers of Victory" was one of the items of the "Plan for Organizational Measures of the Department for Public Relations, Communications, and Youth Policy of the Tyumen Region for February 2017." Maria Potreba, chief specialist of the State Department, [is listed](#) as responsible for this line of work. In Cheboksary, signature collectors in support of the nomination of Vladimir Putin openly state that their work is coordinated by the head of the

Department of Youth and Social Development in the administration of Cheboksary, Stanislav Trofimov.

In 76 regions where the organization is represented, a total of 40 cases were identified (based on open sources) in which the regional branch of "Volunteers of Victory" is led by a member of the government, local government, or a budgetary institution. In all cases, the duties of these employees are directly related to supervision of volunteerism, youth policy, or patriotic education. The "volunteer organization" turns out to be a pseudo-public, para-bureaucratic structure functioning at the taxpayers' expense.

Campaigning and "Student Campaign Headquarters" Supporting Vladimir Putin

The start of Vladimir Putin's campaign saw a mass opening of "Student Campaign Headquarters" of his supporters and the launch of their political activities at universities. **This, in opinion of "Golos," is a questionable development in regard to legislation on elections and education.**

The so-called "Student Campaign Headquarters in Support of Vladimir Putin," like "Volunteers of Victory," draw their human resources from the pool of organizations supervised by "Rosmolodezh." A special place in the campaign of Vladimir Putin is already occupied by the movement of student groups, within the framework of which also come the activities of the "Snow Troopers." Participants in these activities and student activists have repeatedly [participated](#) in campaigning for the "United Russia" party and for "administrative" candidates. For example, on January 25, in the Altai Territory, participants of the "Snow Troopers" met with the co-chairman of the regional election headquarters of Vladimir Putin. It is [reported](#) that 450 students in 20 districts of the region took part in this event. Curator of the regional headquarters of Vladimir Putin's official campaign in Tambov, Andrei Rudnev, [runs](#) the "Regional Headquarters of Student Groups."

Most of the regional curators are members of certain student government structures. Of the 37 regional heads of "Student Headquarters in Support of Vladimir Putin" (the only people about whom "Golos" managed to find at least some information in open sources), 13 turned out to be members—most often leaders—of student self-government bodies in their universities; six others are trade union activists, largely part of the management. These organizations are also, as a rule, under the control of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs and Regional Administrations.

Student trade union committees took active part in the creation of "Student Headquarters" in the Krasnodar Territory and were connected to the majority of "Student Headquarters" assets; students also received [invitations](#) to participate in the opening of the Headquarters from trade union employees and activists.

Such structures always work under strict control from the university administration. A striking example is the Altai Territory, where Pavel Pakhomov, the regional curator of the local "Student Headquarters," [became](#) the chairman of the Student Government of the Altai State Technical University, named after I. I. Polzunov. In this university, the student government is [supervised](#) on the part of the administration by the head of the department for extracurricular

work and assistant professor of the organization and security of traffic, Ivan Ognev, who is also a deputy of the Barnaul City Duma from the “United Russia” party.

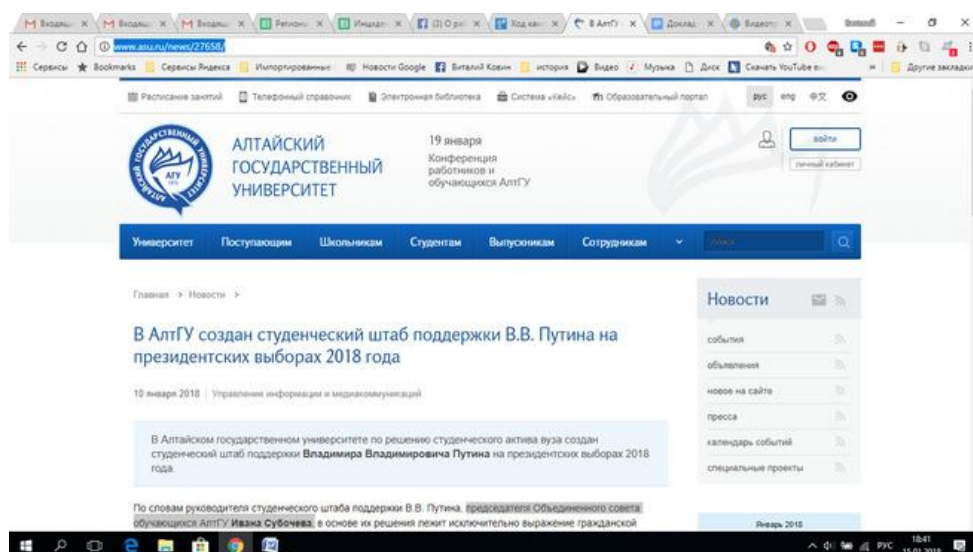
The law strictly prohibits educators and other school officials from using educational activities for political campaigning, or to force students to accept certain political opinions or renounce them.

According to several Altai media reports, in one branch of the Altai State Technical University—Biysk Technological Institute—the head of the local student council [sent out](#) coercive messages asking students to sign in support of the nomination of Vladimir Putin. **According to Russian legislation, participation of a Russian citizen in elections is free and voluntary. No one has the right to exert influence on citizens to force them to participate or not participate in elections, or to impede their free expression of will.**



“Student Headquarters for Vladimir Putin” at the Altai State Technical University

The second Altai university, the Altai State Technical University, [posted](#) information about the opening of “Student Headquarters” on its official website. The organization was headed by Ivan Subotchev, Chairman of the Joint Council of Students of the Altai State Technical University, and the headquarters was created "by the decision of the university's student activist body."



Official site of the Altai State Technical University. Screenshot.

The Altai State Technical University was not the only implicated university. **Some “Headquarters” supervisors are members of regional or city youth parliaments and councils, which are controlled by the relevant departments of regional administrations. These parliaments and councils are created to maintain the loyalty of youth leaders in the regions, creating the illusion of "social elevators."** Curator of the “Student Headquarters” in the Sverdlovsk region Dmitry Biktimirov at a younger age was the chairman of the Council of High School students of the Verkh-Isetsky District. It is exactly such organizations that by design should be supervised by the “RosDetCenter” and the “Russian Schoolchildren's Movement,” linked to the founders of the “Volunteers of Victory.” There were [not only students but also schoolchildren](#) at the opening of Putin’s candidate headquarters in the Voronezh region. It is important to emphasize that participation of minors in campaigning events is strictly prohibited by law.

Para-state Election Monitoring

During the elections, a special role according to the ostensible plan by the authorities should be played by a link of state-run youth organizations and associations of pseudo election-monitoring associations established in recent years by the authorities.

The independent election monitoring movement made headlines in 2011-2012, when it registered massive falsifications in federal elections. The largest monitoring organizations at that time, apart from “Golos,” were “Citizen Observer,” “League of the Voters,” “Sonar,” “Observers of Petersburg,” and several regional associations.

In response, the Kremlin tried to "dilute" the election monitoring community by creating GONGOs—nominally non-governmental public associations created by the initiative and/or participation of the authorities, and working for the interests of officials\.

The main “force” among them was to be the "Corps ‘For Clean Election’,” established by the "Association of Lawyers of Russia" in 2012. They were sent to polling stations by candidate Vladimir Putin, and Tina Kandelaki (a famous Russian TV personality) was involved in their promotion.

At least some “Volunteers of Victory” coordinators are closely connected with this organization. According to the Unified State Register of Legal Entities, the coordinator for the Sverdlovsk region, Anton Manuilov, is also the head of the regional branch of the “Association of Lawyers of Russia,” and the Pskov coordinator, Ekaterina Rodina, even [held](#) a tournament on parliamentary debates with them and the Pskov region election commission. In the Amur region, “Volunteers of Victory” coordinator Alyona Akorchina [works](#) in the MBU Centre for the Development of Youth and Community Initiatives “Vybor,” whose director is coordinator of the “Corps,” Svetlana Tyukalova, who [is also](#) a member of the regional election commission.

The bulk of the organization's observers are law students at state universities. A significant number of the regional coordinators of the “Corps ‘For Clean Elections’” also works there. For example, in the Altai Territory, the organization is [led](#) by Alexei Ivanov, an associate professor

at the Chair of Constitutional and International Law at Altai State University, who is also a [member of](#) the working group on information disputes under the regional election commission. It is noteworthy that in 2014 he was [nominated](#) as a "technical" candidate for the election of the governor of the Altai Territory. The election was won by the incumbent governor and concurrently the chairman of the regional branch of the Association of Lawyers of Russia, Alexander Karlin. Other coordinators of the "Corps 'For Clean Elections'" also have political affiliation: according to open sources, Islam Magomedov in Dagestan is an [activist](#) for the "All-Russia People's Front," and Mikhail Doroshko from the Krasnodar Territory [works](#) as an assistant to a State Duma deputy.

At the end of 2017, despite numerous requests from other organizations working on electoral issues, "Corps 'For Clean Elections'" was the only organization to receive a presidential grant of 9.7 million rubles (about 0.14 million EUR). The goals of the "Young Voter Academy" project, financed by the presidential grant, are to increase turnout in the elections on March 18, 2018 by involving young people in the electoral process and creating conditions for the career development of young specialists in the field of electoral law by nominating them to electoral commissions of various levels as well as to other public structures.

A vivid example of the connection between the leadership of the "Corps 'For Clean Elections'" and administrative resources adverse to independent election monitoring is the long history of blocking the registration of the "Golos" information agency.

In the summer of 2013, "Golos" decided to register a news agency of the same name, which was meant to create a large correspondent network for regular coverage of the elections in Russia.

The "Golos" movement held many meetings to work out its news agency plans. The movement placed high expectations on the planned agency. Co-chairman of the "Golos" movement Grigory Melkonyants submitted the necessary documents to the "Roskomnadzor" for registration of the "News Agency "Golos." However, on August 28, 2013, the registration was rejected because "the name of this media organization might mislead consumers (audiences) regarding its media products," without offering any further explanation. There were no registered media agency with this name in Russia at the time.

While "Golos" was preparing the second package of registration documents for its next attempt to register the agency, it became known that on September 25, 2013, "Roskomnadzor" registered three newspapers based on an LLC called Prospect-TV: newspaper "Golos," online newspaper "Golos," and information agency "Golos." It became clear that the denial of registration was necessary for the "right" organization to file registration documents for the same name, thereby preventing its use by representatives of "Golos."

In 2015, after two years of litigation, the court found the refusal to register the "Golos" news agency illegal and ordered "Roskomnadzor" to register it. Complying with the court's order, an earlier registration application of the news agency was re-submitted, but "Roskomnadzor"

rejected it again, citing the fact that in two years the state registration fee increased and it was necessary for “Golos” to pay the difference. Despite the illegal nature of this request, “Golos” decided to pay the difference to see whether and how “Roskomnadzor” would continue to follow the court's decision.

In July 2015, “Roskomnadzor” for the third time refused to execute the court order to register the news agency based on the same issue it used in the first refusal, which had been deemed illegal by the court: "The name of this media organization might mislead consumers (audiences) about its media products."

After the refusal of “Roskomnadzor” to execute the court's decision, a bailiff received a court order document stipulating that the court's decision to register the news agency must be enforced. “Roskomnadzor” has been fined for failure to comply with the court's order but it persistently continues to refuse to abide by it.

In the last two years, there has not been a single trace of the activity by any of the three “Golos” media entities registered by Prospect-TV LLC. In 2016, these media entities disappeared from the list of registered media and on March 30, 2016, a "News Agency ‘Golos’” appeared in the register instead, registered to a citizen named M. Smirnov, who resides in Balashikh, near Moscow.

In 2017, the information agency registered to M. Smirnov disappears from the register, and on April 14, 2017, in its place appears a “News Agency ‘Golos’,” [registered](#) to Alena Bulgakova, head of the executive committee of the “Corps ‘For Clean Elections.’”

This story demonstrates the difference in approach of “Roskomnadzor” as a state authority towards different applicants and can be considered a discriminatory practice against civil society organizations, which is incompatible with the requirements of the Russian Constitution and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The “Corps ‘For Clean Elections’” in this story was openly used to block the initiative of independent election observers.

The “Corps ‘For Clean Elections’,” along with the "Russia Chooses" movement affiliated with the “United Russia” party, as well as a number of smaller organizations (for example, "Group32," run by Lyubov Biryukova, who until 2017 [worked](#) as a spokeswoman for the election commission in the Volgograd region), is closely connected with another "association of observers”—“National Public Monitoring” (NPM). NPM is a structure created in 2017 without registration. On September 6, 2017, on the eve of the gubernatorial elections, a representative of the organization [stated that they would send 20,000 observers](#) to polling stations. However, the mobile application developed by the organization for its observers two days after Election Day was downloaded by less than 100 people, and the number of copies of the protocols published on the organization's website (gathered mainly by the “Corps ‘For Clean Elections’” and “Russia Chooses”) was less than 500. In addition, during the elections of 2017, NPM launched a copy of the "Map of Violations," created in 2011 by the "Golos" movement. However, only [160 messages were published](#) on their map, 72 of which were

copied from the “Golos” resource, some of which were messages with faulted logic (for example: "ballot boxes for voting [are situated] within their line of sight, which increases the risk of rigging"), or just a meaningless set of symbols (for example, a message from the Trans-Baikal Territory: “ropordlo/ropordlo”).

This year, on the NPM map, all messages from the "Map of Violations" of the "Golos" movement appear automatically, without a reference to the source. At the same time, NPM speakers are referencing these reports to demonstrate their active work.

For example, on February 16, at a press conference in Irkutsk, the regional representative of NPM and the head of the department of social and extracurricular work of the Irkutsk State University, [Alexander Manzula, stated](#) that "A map of violations was created on the website, which shows six reports from the Irkutsk region. Two messages from NPM already arrived at the election commission with a request to find out what is going on," At a press conference, the regional coordinator of the “Golos” movement [Alexei Petrov said](#): "I have very carefully reviewed the NPM site and especially its map of violations. All their news items are copied from other sites, all violations there are violations discovered by "Golos," and next to two of them there is a note saying stating that they are "fake news." How did they come to this conclusion if anyone can go to Stanislavsky Street in Irkutsk and see for themselves that there is a violation? There is illegal campaigning there not paid from the candidate's fund," said Petrov, addressing Alexander Manzula. He added: “Moreover, I called the regional election commission. They do not know anything about you, they did not receive any statements about checking violations from you. On the contrary—the electoral commission officers wanted to know who NPM are!”

The media also note that in the case of NPM, neither its legal status (is the organization registered?), nor its founders, nor the number of its members is publically known. Alexander Manzula could not explain who finances the site, and when asked about the work of the organization’s activists, stated that it was “[on a voluntary basis.](#)”

At the same time, NPM is apparently trying to promote its materials in regional and other media on a fee basis. On February 9, Perm mass media received a message with a proposal to publish news about NPM activities and the arrival of its "experts" in Perm with a promise to "compensate expenses." At least one Perm media agency [published](#) this information. The material refers to the rating of election commissions. In the human rights environment, publication of materials and investigation results for money is considered indecent and unacceptable. The quality of this rating is also doubtful, since NPM representatives on the ground, as a rule, previously had no experience with elections, and the questions used as the basis for the rating have little relevance to the quality of the current electoral process in the regions.

In the regional elections of 2017, NPM acted as an inviting party for so-called "foreign experts," who often appeared in the media as international observers, not having in reality such a status. The "experts" were mainly representatives of extreme right-wing European parties: the French “National Front,” the Italian “League of the North,” the “Democrats of

Sweden," and other similar organizations. At the same time, official representatives of "Democrats of Sweden" have [stated](#) that their deputy's trip to the Russian elections was not agreed on either by their party or the Swedish Parliament.

All activities of the "international experts" were de facto planned and covered at the state level. The main messages were broadcast by state news agencies. The most media-savvy "foreign experts" gave comments to federal TV companies like "Channel One," "All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company," and "NTV", as well as to the largest print and online publications. These comments then were relayed by regional and niche media. Usually, comments from "international observers" [came](#) at the end of a media report and three main points were typically repeated: "the elections had no violations," "elections in Russia and in the West are the same," "one prominent feature of the elections is the use of the latest digital technologies for vote counting and processing."

This time, NPM also invited "international experts." For example, Pedro Mourinho from Spain already works in Udmurtia, and even [took part](#) in the meeting of the working group of the regional Public Chamber. He came to Russia as an international observer once before, in the federal electoral cycle of 2011-2012, when he had accreditation by the CEC of Russia. At the same time, following the results of the elections to the State Duma in 2011 that led to record street protests due to massive falsifications, Mourinho [stated](#) that the international observers "are satisfied with the way elections happened. Elections went in accordance with European standards."

Thus, one of the main functions of "National Public Monitoring" is, on the one hand, to create a simulation of independent public monitoring aimed at foreign audiences, and, on the other, create the illusion of international legitimization of Russian elections for domestic audiences.

It is likely that the new mechanism for sending observers to precinct election commissions was created specifically for the legalization of para-state observers the polling stations in time for the presidential election. This right was granted to the federal and regional public chambers, which in turn are formed by the respective state administrations. Moreover, this rule so far only applies to the presidential election and cannot be applied to other elections.

The described youth organizations are, however, just simple executors. As a rule, the real public figures and actual curators of those organizations are their "senior comrades," who often occupy management positions in the organizations. For example, [Igor Borisov](#), chairman of the "Russian Public Institute of Electoral Law," is also a member of the Public Council of the "Corps 'For Clean Elections'." The "Russian Public Institute of Electoral Law" is a [member](#) of another observer association, the "Civil Control" association, whose member [Georgy Fedorov](#) is a former member of the "Public Chamber of Russia". Alexander Tochenov [is](#) a member of the Presidium of the "Civil Control" association and Deputy Secretary of the "Public Chamber of Russia" (approved by a Presidential decree), as well as President of the Centre for Applied Research and Programs. The association also includes the "Moscow Bureau for Human Rights" (by Alexandr Brod) and the "Centre for Social and Political Studies 'Aspect',"

where Oleg Ivannikov [works](#) together with Georgy Fedorov. Valery Ivanovsky ("Agency for the Implementation of Social and Political Initiatives") and Maxim Grigoriev (a member of the "Public Chamber of Russia" and General Director of the "Foundation for Democracy Studies") are often included in the same group of public experts.

These public figures are not only organizationally related to each other, but also have much in common in their biographies: most of them served in law enforcement agencies in officer positions, including in special service units, or have other connections with such units.

For example, Igor Borisov (co-chairman of the presidential monitoring group for the election of the Human Rights Council and the development of civil society) [graduated](#) from the Military Engineer Institute named after A.Mozhaisky. Afterwards he served for several years as an officer in the armed forces. According to the Unified State Register of Legal Entities, Georgy Fedorov (president of the "Aspect" social and political research centre), leads the "Law and Order Fund." One of the co-founders of "Aspect" is Vladimir Fedorov, who is also president of the "Social Support Fund" of law enforcement agencies "PATRIOT." [Oleg Ivannikov](#) is also an employee of "Aspect," a reserve lieutenant colonel, and [director of the charitable institution "Law and Order."](#) Valery Ivanovsky, who was part of the CEC's former staff in the expert council under the Chairman of the CEC of Russia, graduated from the Suvorov Military School and the Moscow Military University of the Ministry of Defence, majoring in Arabic and English. From 1994 to 2001, he served in the armed forces, including the Russian Army Headquarters. During this period, in his official biography there is also a ["special mission" to Egypt](#). Member of the "Public Chamber of the Russian Federation" Maxim Grigoriev [worked](#) in the 2000s in the structures of "Roszarubezhcenter" at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and "Rosoboronexport" (arms exporter), and now heads the "Foundation for the Study of Democracy Problems," one of the main activities of which [is "foreign policy and soft power."](#) Alexander Tochenov graduated from the Higher Border Military and Political School of the KGB of the USSR and the Humanitarian Academy of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and [spent much of his life serving in the border troops](#). It is Tochenov who is responsible in the "Public Chamber of Russia" for organizing the monitoring of presidential elections.

In more than half the regions where information on agreements between regional public chambers and NGOs on sending observers to the elections was published, the organization of veterans of the security forces was ready to take part in election monitoring. As loyal supporters of the current government, they are now used for making public control in elections more "state-oriented."

In the capital and the regions, "veteran" organizations are one of the pillars of public support of the current government. They actively participate in creating managed but formally public councils and other advisory bodies at various government departments. They replace human rights activists and independent NGOs, pushing them out of the public view. A vivid example of this trend is offered by the veterans of the Federal Penitentiary Service, who have taken key positions in many public election monitoring commissions and are monitoring the observance of prisoners' rights. Representatives of veteran organizations are found in every

regional public chamber. Regional election commissions also often include members from organizations of veterans of Afghanistan, other hot spots, and various law enforcement agencies. As former employees of law enforcement agencies, according to their attitudes and values, representatives of veteran organizations are as a rule tough statesmen who maintain working relations with former colleagues in the service and show group solidarity with them.

However, it is likely that **part of the monitoring corps will again be formed by youth associations**. On February 20, during a press conference at the Russian News Agency TASS, Secretary of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation Valery Fadeev [signed](#) an agreement on cooperation in the field of election monitoring with the "Union of Russian Journalists," "Association of Russian Lawyers," "Russian Youth Union," "Russian Union of Rural Youth," "National Public Monitoring," and the Russian society "Knowledge."

According to Valery Fadeyev, more than 70 thousand citizens have [expressed a desire](#) to go to polling stations as observers from public chambers. "Russian Youth Union" earlier [promised](#) to attract 3-5 thousand young people as observers. The organization also plans to hold concerts at polling stations to increase voter turnout. This will be done in conjunction with the festival "Russian Student Spring," [founded](#) by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture of Russia.

A similar situation has developed around monitoring corps with participants from youth organizations in the regions. For example, in Bashkortostan such an agreement with the Public Chamber [was signed](#) by the regional branches of the "Russian Student Units" and the "Russian Union of Young Scientists." In Permsky Krai and Tomsk Oblast, student groups also [signed such](#) agreements; in the Orenburg, Ryazan, Tomsk, and Yaroslavl regions, regional organizations of the "Russian Union of Youth" also signed such agreements. In the Voronezh Region, Elena Medvedeva, who heads the regional branch of "Volunteers of Victory," is also [responsible](#) for coordinating observation in the "Corps 'For Clean Elections.'" She [is the head](#) of the department for work with youth organizations of the "Regional Youth Centre."

However, simple calculations show that youth organizations today do not have sufficient numbers to implement the declared task of [attracting 100 thousand volunteers](#) to polling stations. Most likely, under the cover of these organizations, the government will mobilize "traditional groups": state employees and other groups dependent on the government, as well as paid observers.

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