



Municipal elections
10 September 2017
Russian Federation

ELECTION CAMPAIGN FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN MOSCOW ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2017 - ANALYTICAL REPORT -

Introduction

Municipal elections in Moscow will take place in 125 city municipalities (124 districts of old Moscow and the urban district of Troitsk). In total, 1,502 seats are to be filled based on the September election results. There are 7,591 registered candidates.

The period of nomination and registration ended in mid-August; it is now election campaign time. However (and as expected), the campaign is being run largely in silence. Local election commissions that organize the elections are not running an appropriate campaign to inform voters about the elections. Regional media, including city television and district newspapers, also continue to pay little attention to the upcoming elections.

In cases where election campaigning is visible in the streets and other areas of the city, it is, as a rule, organized by independent and opposition candidates. In some instances, these candidates face obstacles running their campaigns. At the same time, any election-related scandals and hype about the elections are being nipped in the bud.

“Administrative candidates” – that is, candidates supported by city authorities – prefer to use administrative mobilization networks for their campaign activities from the start of the campaign (in fact, even long before the formal announcement of the elections). They choose this strategy because city administrators adhere to the tactic of restricting the general turnout and mobilizing the so-called “administrative-dependent” electorate.

Conclusions

As expected, current campaigning is mostly taking place under the radar. Most of the election campaigning, as observed in the week before Election Day in the streets and surrounding areas of the city, is being conducted by independent and opposition candidates. These candidates are only occasionally represented on specially designated information stands, billboards, and message boards near residential housing. In some cases, candidates face obstacles when campaigning, but these are currently only sporadic episodes.

Notable are some individual cases of obstruction of legitimate campaign activity, sometimes with the aid of law enforcement. At the same time, the police themselves show little interest in incidents involving damage and destruction of legitimate campaign materials.

Administrative candidates rarely resort to visual outdoor campaigning and prefer to use “administrative mobilization technologies” in their campaign activities. The entire administrative machine, consisting of prefectures of administrative districts, municipal district administrations, and budget organizations, works in their favor.

It is clear that city authorities do not care about turnout in the municipal elections. Moreover, they intend to conduct the so-called “drying” (i.e. reduction) of the general turnout and mobilize the “administratively dependent” electorate. To this end, campaign meetings take place in educational institutions and other budget organizations using the advantages of official positions, thereby violating the requirements and restrictions laid out in the electoral legislation.

At the same time, the very topic of the elections is treated with silence in the media, and the election commissions that organize municipal elections are not overly zealous in informing voters about the election date. In district newspapers, there are extensive reports and information about the administrative activities of administrative candidates and current deputies of municipal assemblies. Meanwhile, in most areas the print versions of regional newspapers are no longer in circulation: they are distributed solely on the Internet.

All scandals and resonant events occurring during the elections are quickly hushed up, once again suggesting that the goal of the authorities is to have a quiet and unremarkable campaign.

During the campaign, instances have occurred in which technology was used to produce indirect campaign effects. These include the “interception” of brands and slogans of public campaigns, and the manipulation of photographs (images) of candidates on information posters. Both technologies, in our opinion, were used to erode “protest votes” and reduce the electoral advantages of recognizable civil activists who are running as independent and opposition candidates.

Campaign print materials. A case of obstruction of election campaigning

There is practically no noticeable campaigning in the streets and other areas of the city. During the entire month of August (the month that accounts for most of the campaign period), there were no traces of electoral advertising on billboards, public transport stops, and street banners. Occasionally, one sees campaigning “cubes” (or “points”) in support of various candidates. Special information stands in residential neighborhoods are dominated by the campaign materials of certain candidates (or teams of candidates running in the same multi-mandate constituency). These are usually self-nominees, candidates from the Communist Party, LDPR, and Yabloko. A similar situation has been observed with regard to campaign print materials (hereinafter: CPMs) distributed to mailboxes.

Recently, sporadic incidents of removal of CPMs belonging to independent candidates have been reported. In the **Krasnoselsky** district, [deliberate damage](#) was done to CPMs posted in support of the team of candidates of the Solidarity movement, and [one of the information stands was dismantled](#). The disappearance of campaign stands was [reported](#) in other regions as well (for example, the **Khamovniki** region).



Moscow, Krasnoselsky district

There have been several cases of removal of candidates' campaign materials from bulletin boards near residential houses and from official information stands. In the **Veshnyaki** district, for instance, an unidentified young man deliberately [removed](#) fresh campaign materials from information stands. In the South Butovo region, unexpectedly and on the orders of the leadership of the GBI "Zhilischnik," all the candidates' [campaign materials](#) were removed from the official information stands. **It is alarming that such reports became more frequent two weeks before Election Day, when election campaigning, as a rule, is in the most intensive stage.**

It should be noted that "deliberately destroying or damaging information material related to elections, referendums, or campaign materials placed in accordance with the law, posted on a building, structure, or other object during an election campaign or referendum campaign, or making inscriptions or images on such material" (Code of Administrative Offenses) carries a [punishment](#) in the form of a fine in the amount of 500-1500 rubles (Article 5.14 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation). **Yet the police, who are in charge of these administrative cases, are often inactive and do not pay attention to such offenses.**

There have been reported cases of exerting pressure on candidates in order to hinder their campaign activities. For example, in **Troparevo-Nikulino**, a candidate from Yabloko, Andrei Safonov, [met with resistance](#) from six young people of a sportive look and athletic build while exercising his election campaign rights. There is a suspicion that their actions were coordinated by the candidate from "Fair Russia," Alexander Mikhailovsky, deputy head of the regional Council of Deputies.

In the aforementioned area, **Krasnoselsky** police detained self-nominated candidate Petr Tsarkov. He was [accused](#) of "campaigning against the authorities." He was soon released from the police department without a protocol. Candidates from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation were [detained](#) in the **Nekrasovka** area for participating in an "uncoordinated picket."

We should remember that in early September, a week before Election Day, the density and regularity of campaign events should increase. Accordingly, efforts to obstruct legitimate election campaigning, including involvement of law enforcement agencies, might also increase.

At the end of August, some administrative districts of the city witnessed the participation of "administrative candidates" in street and apartment campaigning, which is not typical for Moscow elections. On August 30, in **Losinoostrovsky** district, at one of the meetings of the candidates from United Russia with the electorate, there was an [attack](#) on a resident of the district, and, simultaneously, on a candidate from the Party of Growth, Andrei Ulinkin.

So far, sporadic cases of campaign obstruction targeting candidates in Moscow cannot be characterized as a systemic phenomenon; they take place against the backdrop of massive and organized use of official positions and "administrative resources." Publicized obstruction cases are atypical and can partly be explained by the initiatives of competing candidates or excessive "diligence" by law enforcement agencies. **However, the most active phase of the**

campaign is yet to come. It will begin in September, after the end of the "holiday season," and the relatively calm course of the campaign might change.

Territorial election commissions that organize municipal elections do not prevent candidates from carrying out their election campaigning. For candidates, the problem is how to finance the production of campaign materials using their electoral accounts, as there are restrictions on the amount of donations they can receive. Part of the campaign materials, as a rule, is printed on the candidates' own equipment, which is not prohibited by law.



Moscow, Solntsevo

In this context, there is an unsurprising scarcity of reports on the production and distribution of illegal printed materials without payment from the election fund or without specifying the necessary output data. A report on [illegal campaigning](#) in the Northern Tushino area came from the "Map of Violations" resource, where a self-nominee candidate, Anatoly Gutman, personally distributed his incorrectly drafted campaigning materials. There

was also a report on an incident in the Solntsevo district where unregistered campaign materials were [distributed](#) by a team of candidates from United Russia. There are similar reports from the other districts of Moscow.

“Administrative resource”: use of advantages of official positions and infringement on the equality of candidates’ rights during election campaigning

Campaign materials of administrative (pro-governmental) candidates on street stands and in other areas are rare. And this is not accidental. **Administrations, general schools, medical institutions, social service centers, councils of veterans, and other budget organizations are involved in “quiet” campaigning for administrative candidates.** It is common knowledge that electoral legislation [prohibits](#) the use of the official (service) advantages for purposes of election campaigning. The electoral legislation also envisages the creation and observance of conditions for equal access of candidates and parties to public funds, including premises in state and municipal ownership.

As usual, there is campaigning among disabled and elderly people who have social workers attached to them. From the **Don** district came a report that people were [forced](#) to participate in campaigning activities in support of administrative candidates. A mother of a disabled child reported that she was under serious pressure. The woman was told that if she didn’t go to meetings with the candidate from United Russia, she would no longer receive disability benefits for her children.

In the city of **Troitsk**, social services [issued](#) to the elderly a list of the “right.” The pensioners perceived this as instructions on how to vote.

There are a lot of reports about calls to voters from schools and hospitals. Employees of these institutions are inviting voters to meetings with administrative candidates.

For example, in the **Khovrino** district, principal of school No. 597, Elena Zaitseva, [gathered the parents](#) from the second multi-mandate electoral district and campaigned for them to come out on September 10 and vote for the candidate from United Russia, acting deputy Iryna Godovikova, who works at this school.

The principal of school No. 1474, also in the **Khovrino** district, Irina Kurtkatina, who is also the acting municipal deputy and a United Russia candidate in the third constituency, [organized](#) a meeting with voters right in her office. In the same district, the head of the administration openly [campaigned](#) to parents of schoolchildren to vote for administrative candidates.

In the **Lomonosov** district, senior educator Olesya Sonjushkina, from the kindergarten “Olenyonok” (which belongs to school No. 117) [campaigned](#) at a parents’ meeting to “show

a civil position” in favor of the administrative candidate – the school's director, Irina Baburina, and the whole team running for deputies with her.

It should be stressed that the law on education [prohibits](#) pedagogical workers from using educational activities for political campaigning, while the law on political parties [prohibits](#) parties from interfering in the educational process of educational institutions. Parental meetings are considered a part of educational activity; therefore, it is forbidden to use them for the purposes of political campaigning. In addition, such campaign meetings are organized using the advantages of official positions, which is also prohibited by the electoral legislation.

There are complaints from employees of the public sector that they are being forced to engage in political campaigning. For example, a nurse in a clinic in the **Donskoy** district campaigned during official hours in support of her clinic’s leader. At the same time, she [complained](#) to a voter that she was forced to do this.

The premises of state and municipal bodies, as well as public associations, are often used for campaigning for administrative candidates. For example, there was a [campaign poster](#) of the candidate for the first district from United Russia – the head the branch, Marina Rybakova – next to the entrance to the Social Services Center of the **Southern Medvedkovo** district. Other campaign materials supporting Rybakova were posted inside the center. In this case, there is clear evidence of the use of an official position for campaign purposes, as well as evidence of violation of the principle of candidate equality.

In **Zelenograd**, the staff of the Center for Social Services campaigned for a group of candidates and [distributed](#) campaign materials on the premises of the Center. In the **Tsaritsino** district, campaign materials were [distributed](#) in polyclinic No. 62.

In the **Dorogomilovo** district, the premises of the Council of Veterans were used to campaign for certain candidates. On July 14, there was [a campaign meeting](#) with self-nominated candidate Vyacheslav Ninichenko, who is running in the third district, in a room allocated by the city for the activities of the Veterans’ Council. In the room, there were newspapers with images and interviews of candidates, which were distributed as campaign materials. In addition, local residents reported that self-nominated candidate Stanislav Kovalov also conducts campaign events there.

Similar “administrative” technologies have previously been used in Moscow on a large scale. **What is remarkable about these elections is that such technologies are now being used in advance and on a large scale from the very beginning of the election campaign.**

It is reasonable to expect that **the lack of information about the elections in the media and the absence of resonant events [should lead](#) to a lower overall turnout, and that the use of the so-called “administrative-dependent” electorate through “administrative” resources [will give the necessary number of votes](#) for the victory of administrative candidates.**

Campaigning in the mass media

There is an expected and evident preference for “administrative” candidates or current deputies in district newspapers. For example, in the last four months in the Danilovsky district, the newspaper “Danilovsky Vestnyk” has significantly [increased the number of articles](#) about active deputies who are running for re-election on the “administrative list.” For instance, over the past four months there were five articles dedicated to Tatyana Rodionova, acting deputy and candidate for the third district from United Russia. [Five more articles](#) were published about the current deputy from LDPR and the current candidate from United Russia, Sergei Rublev.

During the election campaign, there was significantly more information about the activities of the ZiL Cultural Center (Moscow Automotive Society – Likhachov Plant), whose director, Elena Melvil, is running on the list of United Russia. For comparison, Tamara Pomozova, acting deputy and self-nominated candidate from the “Party of Growth” for the first district, had just one article published about her in four months.

In the same newspaper, one can also [find](#) references to one of the parties that has a list of running candidates in these elections.

This is a typical situation for most areas of Moscow. **However, it is important to note that since 2015, in most areas, printed versions of regional newspapers have been discontinued.** Newspapers are now mostly distributed online; there are associated groups in social networks (for example, “[Danilovsky Vestnyk](#)”). However, the popularity of such groups and websites of district newspapers is minimal (the campaign articles get only a few dozen views). Thus, it is unlikely that this advantage of “administrative” candidates will have a significant electoral effect.

At the time of writing of this report, we did not notice systematic election campaigning in the newspapers of the prefectures of the administrative districts of Moscow, which are distributed free of charge in paper form.

The planned hushed nature of the campaign

Individual attempts “from below,” at the district level, to remove independent or opposition candidates are blocked “from above.” For example, on August 18, the Moscow City Court partially [reinstated](#) candidates from Yabloko in the **Sokol** district, who were unlawfully removed by a district court.

But the most striking example is the situation in the **Koptevo** district, where in late August the chairman of the territorial election commission filed a lawsuit for the removal of a team of opposition candidates from the Communist Party and Yabloko party in the second electoral district. On August 28, the Koptevsky District Court of Moscow – where, it should be noted, the plaintiff used to work – granted the dismissal. Candidates were found guilty of abuse of the freedom of mass media due to the fact that leaflets with their biographies

appeared on advertising stands near residential buildings. The reaction at the city level was very fast. The prosecutor's office filed an appeal, which the Moscow City Court hastily satisfied, returning candidates to the election race. At the same time, the Moscow City Election Commission [removed](#) the chairman of the territorial election commission from the post of chairman and forced him to file an application for resignation as a member of the commission.

At the same time, any negative statements regarding the status of documents submitted by "administrative candidates" at the nomination stage are being suppressed. In the **Golovinsky** district, for example, there is a dispute about the registration of a candidate from United Russia, Nadezhda Arkhoptsova, who did not disclose a previous conviction in her application. Her registration was disputed by another candidate, but then the information about Arkhoptsova's [criminal record](#) suddenly appeared on the official website of the election commission, and the commission itself announced that it was in possession of all the documents [absent during registration](#).

The described cases of suppressing scandals and resonant events demonstrate a plan and intention for a hushed election campaign.

Other technologies related to campaigning

A notable example of the technological approach used in Moscow, and which has an indirect campaign effect, is the **"interception" of protest brands and manipulation of photographs on information posters.**

One way to "intercept" a brand or a slogan might look like this: before the election, one of the existing non-profit organizations is renamed – either the name (slogan) of a socially important topic is included in the new name, or a name with a high degree of similarity to the name of a district public association. After that, such a brand can be used in the campaign materials of "spoiler candidates" (candidates meant to undermine specific candidates) or "technical candidates" (those who do not intend to take the post even if elected), and whose task is to distort the votes for non-administrative candidates. At the same time, there is usually no active campaigning on the part of "spoiler candidates." However, the use of "stolen" brands can play a significant role on Election Day.

The story of the "We Are Against Renovation" brand is indicative of this phenomenon, because candidates supporting it suddenly appeared in the districts of **Kapotnya, Severnoye Izmaylovo, and Timiryazevsky**. An organization with this name [was created](#) by renaming the "Public Organization for Families with Disabled Children – Pulse," in the Kapotnya Municipal District, [headed](#) by Elena Kolesnikova, a municipal deputy from United Russia in the Kapotnya District. It is important to stress that Northern Izmaylovo and Timiryazevsky districts are areas where active and well-known participants and organizers of the actual movement against the law on renovation – Yulia Galyamina and Ekaterina Vinokurova – live.

A similar situation occurred with the renaming of the regional children's non-governmental organization "Knockdown Karate," which until 2016 was headed by a deputy from United

Russia in the district of **Lublino**. The organization was renamed “We Are Against Paying for Parking.”

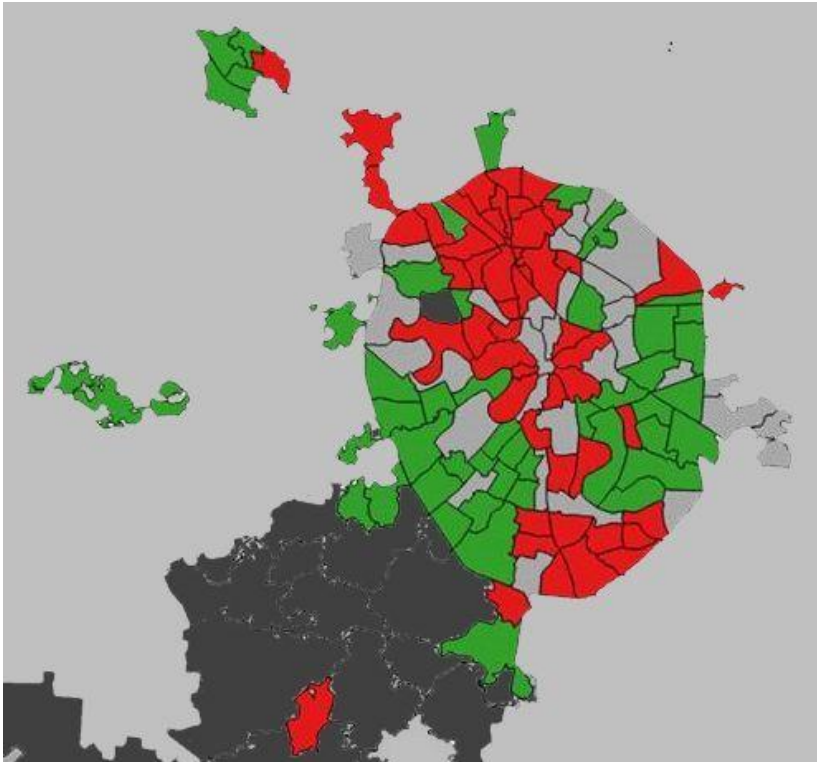
In the **Dorogomilovo** district, there [suddenly](#) appeared a registered organization named “Public Council Dorogomilovo,” whose name caused considerable confusion because it closely resembles the name of a well-known protest group in the district. Prior to renaming, “Public Council Dorogomilovo” was a regional youth public organization named “Sports and Patriotic Association “School of Courage”.”

The technology of “intercepting” a brand is more effective in cases where less information about candidates is available to the voter. And this point is not lost on the city authorities. **Immediately before the elections, the city adopted a law reducing the information on candidates required for inclusion on an information poster in the voting premises.** Under the new rules, such posters should contain “not less” information than in the ballot, namely: last name, first name, patronymic, year of birth, place of residence and occupation, the name of the association that nominated the candidate, and criminal record information. In particular, images (photos) of candidates were excluded from the list of necessary information.

Some voters prefer to make their choice after arriving to the voting station. Such voters largely make their choice based on information on candidates displayed on information posters. **It is to be assumed that the exclusion of photographs would reduce electoral advantages of independent and opposition candidates from among the recognizable district civil activists.** In addition, such a presentation of candidate information [obscures](#) the unhealthy age difference between administrative and independent candidates.

As of August 31, decisions on the content of information posters were published in 76% of all territorial commissions (95 out of 125). Among these 95 municipalities, only in 46% of cases did photographs [remain](#) on the posters.

Looking at the geographical distribution of areas where the photographs remained and where they were removed from the lists, we can note a strong correlation in some administrative districts. It is especially strong in the Central and Southern administrative districts of Moscow, where at the moment there is not a single area with photographs on posters. This once again confirms our assumption that the headquarters of administrative candidates [coordinate](#) at the prefectural level with administrative districts.



Picture: Map of Moscow according to the project MCEC-[aggregator](#) on August 31. Green color: areas where posters have photographs. Red: areas where posters do not have photographs. Dark gray: areas without elections (New Moscow, except the Troitsk and Shchukino districts). Gray: areas where election commission decisions on the content of information posters have not been published.

*Dmitry Nesterov,
regional coordinator of the "Golos" movement in the city of Moscow*

*Vitaly Averin,
coordinator of the regional network of the "Golos" movement*

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