

Research Reports

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Latest Developments in Russia's Regions Political Stability Seen in Unified Regional Elections

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Introduction

From September 17 to 19, 2021, regional elections were held in Russia simultaneously with elections for the State Duma, and elections for heads of regions, regional parliaments, and municipal assemblies were conducted across the country. Incumbents were re-elected in all the elections for regional heads, United Russia became the leading party in all the regional legislatures, and regional political stability in Russia was demonstrated by the absence of the turbulent events of a few years ago, such as the victory of an opposition candidate over the incumbent governor or opposition parties becoming the leading parties in regional legislatures. This paper discusses the results of the September 2021 unified regional elections.

Elections for Regional Heads

In the 2021 nationwide regional elections, residents directly elected their heads in nine federal constituent entities (Republic of Mordovia, Tuva, Chechnya, Khabarovsk Krai, Belgorod Oblast, Penza Oblast, Tver Oblast, Tula Oblast, and Ulyanovsk Oblast), and incumbent heads (or acting heads) were re-elected in all constituent entities. In particular, Ramzan Kadyrov of the Chechen Republic was re-elected with an overwhelming approval rating of 99.7%, despite his initial hesitation to run in the gubernatorial election. In the Siberian republic of Tuva, where voter turnout was as high as in Chechnya, former Kyzyl mayor Vladislav Khovalyg was elected with 86.81% of the vote. Sholban Kara-Ool, who had led Tuva for 14 years, had resigned in April 2021, and Khovalyg became acting head. The retired Kara-Ool won in the State Duma elections and became Deputy Chairman of the State Duma. In addition, Aleksey Dyumin of Tula Oblast, the only independent to run in the election, won with a high 83.58% of the vote, eclipsing the Communist Party candidate in second place (8.97%). Dyumin, who previously served as Deputy Defense Minister and, before that, as Chief Security Guard for President Vladimir Putin, is closely associated with former Emergency Situations Minister Yevgeny Zinichev, who died in an accident on September 8, and former Yaroslavl Governor Dmitry Mironov, who became Assistant to the President on October 12. He is one of the heads with the strongest ties to the president and the current administration.

This election also resulted in the emergence of Governors with origins other than United Russia, such as Aleksey Russkikh (Ulyanovsk Oblast Governor) of the Communist Party and Mikhail Degtyaryov (Khabarovsk Krai Governor) of the Liberal Democratic Party. However, while Russkikh won with 83.16% of the vote, Degtyaryov had a low support rate of 56.77%, and the candidate from A Just Russia-For Truth came in second with 25.43%.

In addition, in the Republic of Mordovia and Belgorod Oblast, where the choice was made to replace their heavyweight governors, acting heads from completely different regions, the Republic of Dagestan and Stavropol Krai, respectively, were elected with more than 78% of the vote. The selection of an acting governor to succeed former Belgorod Governor Yevgeny Savchenko, who was the longest serving Governor in the region (October 1993-September 2020), resulted after many twists and turns in Vyacheslav Gladkov, the Deputy Prime Minister of Stavropol Krai, who had no connection with Belgorod, who took office on November 18, 2020, and faced with his first election in September 2021. On the same day, Vladimir Volkov, who had been involved in the Administration of the Republic of Mordovia for more than 20 years as both Chairman of the State Assembly, the number two position in the republic, and Head of the Republic, announced his resignation, and Artyom Zdunov, the former Minister of economy of the Republic of Tatarstan and most recently the Chairman of the Government of the Republic of Dagestan, became the acting head of the government heading into the recent election.

Also winning more than 70% of the vote was Oleg Melnichenko of Penza Oblast. Ivan Belozertsev had been ousted as Governor of Penza Oblast in March 2021 after being arrested for corruption and abuse of power. Born in Penza, Melnichenko has experience in the Penza government (Minister of Education

and Science, Vice Governor, Deputy Chairman of the Government, etc.) as well as a career in other regions such as the Far Eastern Federal District and the Volga Federal District. Most recently, he was a senator of the Russian Federation representing Penza Oblast, in which capacity he chaired the Committee on Federal Structure, Regional Policy, Local Self-Government and Northern Affairs. He is truly a specialist of local affairs.

Igor Rudenya of Tver Oblast, who received the lowest share of the vote in this election, was re-elected with a bare majority of 52.33%.

In addition to direct elections by residents, voting was also carried out in local assemblies that have adopted a system in which heads are elected through indirect elections by regional legislatures. Rashid Temrezov, who has served as Head of Karachay-Cherkessia since 2011, was re-elected to the post after winning the support of 48 out of 50 members. Sergey Menyaylo, former Presidential Envoy of the Siberian Federal District, who took office as acting Head in April 2021, was elected as head in the Parliament of North Ossetia-Alania with the support of 57 members out of 70. In the Republic of Dagestan, members of the People’s Assembly newly elected in the unified local elections voted on October 14 for a new Head. In October 2020, Vladimir Vasilyev retired as the Head of the Republic, and Sergey Melikov, a member of the Federation Council representing Stavropol Krai and former Plenipotentiary Representative of the North Caucasus Federal District, took over as Head.

Table: Results of the 2021 Elections for Heads of Regions

	Region	Winner (affiliation) (previous position)/ runner-up (affiliation)	% of vote	Turnout rate
1	Republic of Mordovia	Artyom Zdunov (United Russia) (November 2020 - Cchairman of the Government of the Republic of Dagestan) Dmitry Kuzyakin (Communist Party, member of the State Duma)	78.26% 11.48%	65.20%
2	Republic of Tuva	Vladislav Khovalyg (United Russia) (April 2021 - Acting Mayor of Quizil) Choygana Seden-ool (Communist Party, teacher)	86.81% 4.04%	82.92%
3	Chechen Republic	Ramzan Kadyrov (United Russia) (February 2007 - current position) Isa Khajimuradov (SRZP, former Mayor of Grozny)	99.70% 0.15%	94.61%
4	Khabarovsk Krai	Mikhail Degtyarev (Liberal Democratic Party) (July 2020 - Acting member of the State Duma) Marina Kim (Fair Russia, TV Host)	56.77% 25.43%	43.82%
5	Belgorod Oblast	Vyacheslav Gladkov (United Russia) (November 2020 – Chief of staff of the government of Stavropol Krai) Kirill Skachko (Communist Party, Belgorod City Council member)	78.79% 9.94%	58.57%

6	Penza Oblast	Oleg Melnichenko (United Russia) (March 2021 - acting Governor, Federation Council member) Oleg Shalyapin (Communist Party, deputy head of Penza)	72.38% 12.35%	57.00%
7	Tver Oblast	Igor Rudenya (United Russia) (2016 - current position) Lyudmila Voloviova (Communist Party, Legislative Assembly member)	52.33% 20.09%	41.76%
8	Tula Oblast	Aleksey Dyumin (Independent) (February 2016 - current position) Vladimir Isakov (Communist Party, Tula City Duma member)	83.58% 8.97%	52.60%
9	Ulyanovsk Oblast	Aleksey Russkikh (April 2021 - acting Governor, former Federation Council member) Gennady Budarin (Green Party, Ulyanovsk City Duma member)	83.16% 5.5%	45.50%
	North Ossetia	Sergey Menyaylo (April 2021 – Presidential Rnvoy of the Siberian Federal District)	57 of 70 votes	
	Karachay-Cherkessia	Rashid Temrezov (March 2010 - current position)	48 of 50 votes	
	Republic of Dagestan	Sergey Melikov (October 2020 – acting Head of the Republic of Dagestan, Federation Council member)	82 of 87 votes	

Source: Prepared based on data published by the electoral commissions of each federal constituent entity.

Elections of Regional Parliaments

In the nationwide regional elections, 39 federal entities held parliamentary elections. United Russia emerged as the leading party in all proportional representation elections, winning more than half of the vote in eight regions: Chechnya (89.20%), Ingushetia (82.10%), Dagestan (73.74%), Mordovia (67.21%), Stavropol (60.34%), Tambov (57.91%), Tyumen (50.07%) and the Jewish Autonomous Region (62.38%). However, United Russia's share of the vote was more than 15% lower than in the previous elections in the Republic of Mordovia and Chuvashia and significantly less than a majority in Kirov Oblast (27.26%), Adige (28.61%), Karelia (28.96%), Novgorod Oblast (29.46%), Omsk Oblast (31.29%) and Krasnoyarsk Krai (31.69%). As a result, United Russia lost 30 seats.

Looking at other major political parties, A Just Russia-For Truth won seats in the legislative elections for all constituent entities, as did United Russia. The Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party

won legislative seats in 38 and 36 regions, respectively, but the results of these two parties were in contrast. The Communist Party gained votes in 34 regions, particularly in the Legislative Assembly of Primorsky Krai, where it won 31.02% of the vote, up more than 10% from the previous elections. The party also won 14 seats, up from eight in the previous election. In Orenburg Oblast (29.11%), Vologda Oblast (24.2%), Sverdlovsk Oblast (22.98%) and Leningrad Oblast (20.7%), its share of the vote increased by 8-9% from the previous elections. On the other hand, the Liberal Democratic Party lost both votes and seats in all areas where it has won seats.

In addition to these major political parties, New People, which won a State Duma seat in a proportional representation constituency for the first time, performed well. The party has won legislative seats in as many as 20 of the 39 constituent entities, and ranks fourth in proportional representation in Kamchatka Krai, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Astrakhan Oblast, and St. Petersburg, surpassing the Liberal Democratic Party and A Just Russia-For Truth. The Party of Pensioners secured seats in 16 regions, Yabloko three and The Greens one.

Municipal Elections

In the unified regional elections, municipal elections were also held in the administrative centers of 11 regions of the Russian Federation, and United Russia became the leading party in all of them. In general, urban residents tend to oppose the current government more than rural residents, and elections held in large cities pose a major challenge to the government. In fact, United Russia faced an uphill battle in the 2020 municipal elections in Tomsk, Novosibirsk and Tambov. This time was calm, however, with no strong headwind facing the administration.

In particular, at the Kemerovo City Council, where half of the seats are elected through single-seat constituencies and half through proportional representation, United Russia gained a high 72.77% share of the vote in the proportional representation. In addition, United Russia candidates won all 18 single-seat constituencies, leading to an overwhelming victory with 31 of the 36 seats. In Kemerovo Oblast's second-largest city Novokuznetsk, United Russia won 60.48% of the proportional representation seats and 17 out of 18 single-seat constituencies. Similarly, in the Stavropol City Council, United Russia won 62.26% of the proportional representation seats, while United Russia candidates were elected in all 20 single-seat constituencies, winning 27 of the 30 seats. United Russia candidates won all 14 single-seat constituencies for the Saransk City Council in Mordovia, although the party fell short of a majority (48.21%) in the proportional representation constituencies. United Russia won more than half of the vote (66.61% of the votes cast) for the Ufa City Council in Bashkortostan and 63.5% of the vote for the Khanty-Mansiysk City Council in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug.

On the other hand, in the city councils of Petrozavodsk in the Republic of Karelia and Perm in the Perm Oblast, the proportional representation tallies for United Russia were 29.26% and 29.39%, respectively, both less than 30%. The votes were somewhat evenly divided in the former among the Communist Party (17.88%), A Just Russia-For Truth (11.15%), Yabloko (9.88%), the Liberal Democratic Party

(7.82%), and the Party of Pensioners (7.27%); and in the latter among the Communist Party (19.62%), A Just Russia-For Truth (11.77%), New People (11.57%), and the Liberal Democratic Party (8.24%). However, United Russia won a landslide victory in the single-seat constituencies of both city councils, with its candidates elected in 12 of 14 constituencies in Petrozavodsk and 20 of 22 in Perm.

In the Grozny City Council in Chechnya and the Nalchik City Council in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, where only proportional representation votes were cast, United Russia won 89.9% and 63.9% of the vote and secured 25 of 27 seats and 21 of 33 seats, respectively. In the cities of Kaliningrad and Saratov, where votes were only cast in single-seat constituencies, United Russia also won big, with 21 of the 27 seats and 31 of the 35 seats, respectively.

Trained Head Candidates

On October 4, 2021, Putin appointed Aleksandr Avdeyev, a member of the State Duma, as acting Governor of Vladimir Oblast. Sergey Sipyagin, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party's electoral list, stepped down as Governor on September 29 and announced his intention to become a member of the State Duma. Sipyagin was one of the opposition governors who had played a role in the "tumultuous" gubernatorial election of September 2018, when he defeated then-incumbent governor Svetlana Orlova, a candidate backed by United Russia. Avdeyev, who was transferred from the State Duma, served as the Mayor of Obninsk, the second-largest city in Kaluga Oblast, from 2010 to 2015 and as the Deputy Governor of Kaluga from 2015 to 2016, playing a role in that region's success in attracting investment sometimes referred to as the "Miracle of Kaluga". He has also graduated from the Presidential Program for Training Management Personnel at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, called the "gubernatorial training school", which has produced many regional heads in recent years.

On the same day, Aleksandr Nikitin, Governor of Tambov, was also removed from office, and Maxim Yegorov, Deputy Minister of Construction, Housing and Utilities, became acting Governor. Yegorov, a native of Nizhny Novgorod, served as an Adviser to the Governor of Tyumen Oblast, but moved to Moscow when then-governor Vladimir Yakushev became the Minister of Construction, Housing and Utilities. After serving as an Adviser to the Minister, he assumed the post of Deputy Minister. Yegorov, who has experience in rural areas, has also completed the "gubernatorial training school" as has Avdeev. Meanwhile, Nikitin, who replaced his predecessor Oleg Betin as acting Governor in May 2015 and officially became Governor in the September elections of the same year, had just been re-elected in September 2020. In the Tambov municipal election held at the same time as his reelection, Motherland, headed by former Mayor Maxim Kosenkov (2005-2008), was the leading party with 45.7% of the votes, while United Russia came in second with 20.6% of the votes. In November 2020, Kosenkov returned as acting Mayor. In the legislative election in the Tambov constituency held within the framework of the recent unified local elections, United Russia remained the leading party (42 seats out of 50) with 57.91% of the vote. Nikitin's resignation can be partly attributed to his inability to establish good

relations with the local elite (RBC, October 14, 2021). After leaving office, Nikitin became a member of the Federation Council.

Following the appointment of Dmitry Mironov, Governor of Yaroslavl Oblast, as Assistant to the President on October 12, Mikhail Yevrayev, former Deputy Head of the Federal Antimonopoly Service (November 2018-February 2021), became acting Governor. Yevraev is also a graduate of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration's Presidential Program for Training Management Personnel. Yaroslavl Oblast was one of the regions in which United Russia received its lowest share of the vote at 29.72% in the proportional representation constituencies for the State Duma elections. This is thought to be the reason for Mironov's resignation as Governor (Commerzant, October 12, 2021). On the other hand, he had worked in the security services and was deputy minister of the interior just before he became governor in 2016. Having served as Putin's security guard when he worked for the Federal Protective Service, he is highly trusted by the president and is said to be likely to move to a higher level in the security services.

Conclusion

The development of Russia's regions will require self-help efforts from the regional governments. It is essential to have competent, experienced and knowledgeable heads who can implement such policies. The federal government's recent policy of forcing a head to resign before the end of his term and having an acting head appointed by the President to replace him, all but ensuring an election victory, has sometimes been criticized as a de facto presidential appointment system. On the other hand, it is necessary for the social and economic development of individual regions, as well as for the development of the country as a whole, to nurture and properly allocate competent human resources to realize regional development. The political stability of regions is directly linked to their economic and financial stability as reflected in people's livelihoods, and the administrative skills of heads will undoubtedly become of ever greater importance.

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