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Experience Of Remote E-Voting in Political Elections in Russia

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Abstract

In 2019, for the first time in Russia, an experiment was conducted on remote electronic voting (REV), the results of which had legal significance. Seven Russian constituent entities received the opportunity to vote remotely in elections at various levels from 2019 to 2021. The paper contains an analysis of the electoral behaviour of the population in the Russian regions where remote electronic voting was organized. The study is aimed at identifying electoral interest in the opportunity to vote remotely. The category of interest is expressed in the registration of the electorate to participate in remote voting. The paper also provides a comparative analysis of the results obtained for the expression of the voters' will in the traditional and remote form. It is necessary to determine whether the percentages of support for certain political forces in traditional and remote voting coincide; or there is no correlation between the two forms, therefore, it is possible advancement of sociological hypotheses associated with various social groups that have differences in the preference for one of the two forms of voting. Based on the results of the study, conclusions were drawn about the turnout of voters for remote voting, as well as quantitative data demonstrating differences in the results of voting for certain political forces in the traditional and remote ways. For the implementation of future research, the author's hypotheses are presented that explain the differences in the

results of remote and traditional voting. Confirmation or refutation of hypotheses can serve as an object of potential research.

Key words: political elections, remote e-(electronic) voting, electoral activity, voter turnout, political parties, regions of Russia.

1 Introduction

Digitalization of the institution of elections is a continuous process of evolution of Russian political life. Since the formation of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation in 1993, the technical aspects and practical forms of voting have undergone many changes. One of the main tasks of the electoral system in the administrative field was to increase the level of its transparency and legitimacy. In this regard, the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation developed new forms of voting control in order to improve the objectivity of the results expressing the voters' will.

In 1996, ballot scanners (SIB-96) were developed. These devices were designed to automatically count votes by scanning paper ballots. In 2004, ballot scanners were replaced by ballot processing complexes (BPCs). Currently, the BPC-2010 technology is used. In parallel with the complexes for processing ballots, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Russian Federation introduced sensory voting devices at polling stations; they are also electronic voting complexes (EVCs). This device was an electronic machine that read votes of electors in a sensory way without a paper ballot.

At the same time, the task of the Central Election Commission is not only to increase the population's confidence in the elections, but also to ensure the convenience of voting. Since 2007, the CEC of the Russian Federation has been headed by V.E. Churov, who was actively interested in the possibility of introducing remote voting. In 2009, the CEC was guided by the fact that a full-fledged remote voting with the legal significance of the results could take place in 2012. Despite the fact that during the chairmanship of Churov V.E., remote voting was not implemented, already in 2008 and 2009 the CEC of the Russian Federation conducted training experiments on the introduction of electronic technologies in the electoral process. In particular, in 2008 and 2009, a total of 6 election campaigns tested various forms of voting in parallel with official voting.

As mentioned earlier, the first ideas for introducing remote voting into the electoral process were declared by V. E. Churov, Chairman of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation from 2007 to 2016. However, after the experiment with conducting electronic polls in the 2008 and 2009, with election campaigns analysed earlier, the practical implementation of voting outside the polling station in the electoral process was suspended for almost 10 years. In 2019, an experiment took place in Russia to conduct remote electronic voting (REV) via the Internet, without coming to the polling station; the results of that experiment had legal significance. Voting results are calculated automatically by the system (there is no manual calculation). From 2019 to 2021, an experiment with remote voting was conducted in 7 regions of Russia.

2 Methods

The paper is based on a quantitative comparative analysis of Russian regions. In particular, a quantitative calculation of the proportion of voters who registered for remote electronic voting in the territories where it was regulated is carried out. This takes into account all federal and regional election campaigns where remote voting was held in the period from 2019 to 2021. The study also contains a calculation of voter turnout separately for those who chose the remote form of expression of will. The second conceptual quantitative method is the calculation of the share of support for political entities exercising passive suffrage separately in traditional and remote voting. This analysis reveals whether there is a correlation between the results of voting in two separate forms. The synthesis of two forms of voting leads to the formulation of sociological hypotheses regarding electoral behaviour in remote electronic voting.

3 Results And Discussion

In 2019, an experiment on remote voting was conducted in Moscow. Further, the technology was scaled up in elections in other regions. The selection of subjects for conducting remote electronic voting was carried out according to the "bottom-up" system. In 2019, at the elections to the regional parliament of the city of Moscow, this federal importance region independently took the initiative and implemented an experiment based on its own technological system developed by the Department of Information Technologies of the city of Moscow. Even at the legislative level, the possibility of conducting a DEG was regulated first in Moscow, and then at the federal level; and this is a legal conflict. From 2020, the regions had to independently take the initiative by submitting an application for remote voting. In 2020, for the All-Russian voting on amendments to the Constitution, five subjects had a desire to implement remote voting in the elections, of which the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation selected two: Moscow and the Nizhny Novgorod Region. In 2021, the CEC considered at a meeting ten applications from regions to conduct remote voting for elections to the State Duma, of which seven were approved: the federal cities of Moscow and Sevastopol, as well as the Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Kursk, Murmansk, and Rostov regions. All companies in which DEG was carried out are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Scaling remote e-voting technology from 2019 to 2021

Year / **Election level**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
Federal		Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod region *(Constitution)* Kursk region, Yaroslavl region *(State Duma of the Russian Federation, by-elections)*	Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod region Kursk region, Yaroslavl region, Murmansk region, Rostov region, Sevastopol (*State Duma of the Russian Federation)*

Regional	Moscow (Moscow City Duma)	Moscow *(Number of election campaigns: 2)*	Moscow *(Moscow City Duma, by-elections)* Nizhny Novgorod Region *(Legislative Assembly)* Kursk Region *(Kursk Region Duma)* Yaroslavl Region *(Yaroslavl Region Duma, by-elections)* Rostov Region *(Legislative Assembly, by-elections)* Murmansk Region *(Murmansk Region Duma)* Sevastopol *(Legislative Assembly, by-elections*)	
Municipal			Moscow *(Number of election campaigns: 1)* Nizhny Novgorod Region *(Number of election campaigns: 79)* Kursk Region *(Number of election campaigns: 121)* Yaroslavl Region *(Number of election campaigns: 6)* Rostov Region *(Number of election campaigns: 405)* Murmansk Region *(Number of election campaigns: 6)* Sevastopol (*Number of election campaigns: 8)*	

To date, remote voting has been carried out in more than 600 election campaigns at various levels. It is worth noting that scaling continues in 2022; 8 subjects will conduct remote voting on their territory, of which 5 will organize this form for the first time.

In order to assess the interest in remote electronic voting, it is necessary to estimate the proportion of the electorate that was registered for this form of expression of will. Below are the results in the context of federal entities and election campaigns in terms of the electorate wishing to vote outside their polling station (Table 2).

Table 2 Indicators of electoral participation in remote e-voting in federal and regional election campaigns

Year	Type of election campaign (federal and regional)	The federal entity of the Russian Federation	Number of voters (remote voting)	Number of voters (total)	Share of voters (remote voting, %)
2019	Elections to the Moscow City Duma	Moscow city	11 227	503 890	2.23
2020		Moscow city	1 051 155	7 861 697	13.37
	All-Russian vote (Constitution)	Nizhny Novgorod Region	139 571	2 576 933	5.42

2021	State Duma of the Russian Federation, by-elections	Kursk region	13 184	451 031	2.92
		Yaroslavl region	18 384	521 575	3.52
	State Duma of the Russian Federation	Kursk region	50 580	903 644	5.60
		Murmansk region	49 193	587 394	8.37
		Nizhny Novgorod Region	126 493	2 571 312	4.92
		Rostov region	301 990	3 400 823	8.88
		Yaroslavl region	86 532	1006556	8.60
		Moscow city	2014765	7 764 507	25.95
		Sevastopol	20 772	338 108	6.14
	Legislative Assembly, by-elections	Rostov region	5 360	117 521	4.56
	Yaroslavl Regional Duma, by-elections	Yaroslavl region	2355	35 959	6.55
	Legislative Assembly, by-elections	Sevastopol	2502	37 674	6.64

The table shows the results for all federal and regional campaigns, excluding regional elections in Nizhny Novgorod, Kursk, and Murmansk regions, as well as excluding by-elections to the Moscow City Duma, since data in the State Automated System "Vybory" (GAS) for the regional Moscow 2021 campaign is hidden.

In 2019, in the Elections to the Moscow City Duma, 2.23% of voters had registered for the REV. This is the average proportion of constituencies where remote voting took place. Out of 45 districts, 3 districts were selected for the experiment. The choice was due to the voting of citizens on the “Active Citizen” portal. Further, the activity of Muscovites increased from year to year. At the All-Russian voting on the Constitution, the indicator of those registered for the REV was 13.37%, at the elections to the State Duma - 25.95%. This growth can be explained by the fact that the region actively agitated the population to join the remote system. The rest of the subjects, for understandable geographical and administrative-territorial reasons, have a low interest in remote voting compared to Moscow, less than 9% of voters registered for remote voting. At the All-Russian voting on the Constitution in the Nizhny Novgorod region, a little more than 5% of voters registered for the REV. In the State Duma Elections, their number was 0.5% less, although it was expected that the reuse of the technology would lead to an increase in the level of interest of Nizhny Novgorod region population in the REV. If we do not take into account Moscow, then in the parliamentary elections, the share of the electorate registered for the REV was exactly 7%. Positive dynamics is demonstrated by the Kursk and Yaroslavl regions, which in 2021 used the opportunity to vote outside the polling

station much more actively than in 2020, however, it should be taken into account that interest in by-elections is objectively less than in the prime ones, which also cover all constituencies.

An important feature is that the turnout of voters registered for remote voting is at least 90% with rare exceptions. That is, if a person registers to vote outside a polling station, as a rule, he/she does not ignore the election. This is an objective process, since the wording of the REV itself indicates that a person is interested in participating in elections.

Next, it is necessary to consider whether the voting results are correlated in the traditional and remote ways. Quantitative analysis showed that there is no correlation. The very first experiment in Moscow produced conflicting results. In Constituency No. 30 (Chertanovo Central, Chertanovo Yuzhnoye), a candidate actually from the United Russia party Margarita Rusetskaya, as well as self-nominated Roman Yuneman, ran. In the traditional voting, Yuneman overtook Rusetskaya by 581 votes, and in the remote voting, Yuneman was already ahead of Rusetskaya by 665 votes. As a result, Roman Yuneman lost with a difference of 84 votes. This situation was the beginning of the emerging disputes about the honesty of remote voting. Roman Yuneman challenged his result in court, citing the same arguments about technical failures of the system on voting day. In January 2022, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation dismissed Yuneman's claim to annul the results of the 2019 elections.

The all-Russian vote on the Constitution passed without significant discrepancies in the results, regardless of the form of voting. In Moscow, 62% of the electorate voted for the amendments to the Constitution in the remote voting and 66% in the traditional one. In the Nizhny Novgorod region, 60% voted "For" in the remote voting and 80% in the traditional one.

The 2021 parliamentary campaign has shown mixed results. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation did not recognize remote voting in Moscow, since United Russia, significantly inferior in terms of voting results at polling stations, heavily beat competitors in electronic voting. The results in 8 out of 15 constituencies were opposite in relation to the final result. "United Russia" lost 8 constituencies in the traditional voting. In this regard, the Communists held rallies against election fraud, but no one was able to prove the facts of this fraud. There are no real reasons to consider the result illegitimate. The candidates who ran to the State Duma from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation are currently suing for the cancellation of the results of the REV. A similar situation occurred in Moscow at elections at all levels: by-elections to the Moscow City Duma in 2021 (candidates Petr Karmanov and Daria Bagina did not recognize the results of remote voting); Elections of the Council of Deputies of the Shchukino municipal district in the city of Moscow (Andrey Grebennik did not recognize the results of the elections and called on "dishonest deputies" to refuse deputy mandates).

For elections to the State Duma, it is possible to make a comparative analysis of support for parties in traditional and remote voting by region (Table 3).

Table 3 Comparative analysis of the results of traditional and remote voting in the elections to the State Duma (R - Remote ; T - Traditional)

No.	Parties	Kursk region		Murmansk region		Nizhny Novgorod Region		Rostov region		Yaroslavl region		Moscow city		Sevastopol		Total average per party (R - T)
		R	**T**	**R**	**T**	**R**	**T**	**R**	**T**	**R**	**T**	**R**	**T**	**R**	**T**	
1	CPRF	13.6	20.6	11.8	19.0	15.9	19.7	8.7	22.5	14.2	24.6	15.1	29.6	9.3	12.9	**-8.62**
2	Greens	1.6	0.5	2.5	1.2	1.9	0.6	1.2	0.6	2.2	1.0	3.2	1.4	4.3	1.2	**1.49**
3	LDPR	9.2	10.8	10.0	11.2	8.3	7.0	6.9	6.9	7.4	9.2	7.2	6.6	9.5	8.3	**-0.22**
4	New people	11.2	6.2	11.5	7.8	9.0	4.8	5.0	5.2	9.7	7.3	7.6	6.1	7.4	4.9	**2.71**
5	United Russia	46.2	42.9	40.5	34.6	42.2	49.9	66.6	48.2	38.5	27.4	43.4	29.2	53.3	56.3	**6.01**
6	Fair Russia	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	10.9	8.4	4.0	6.9	17.6	19.4	6.6	7.8	8.3	7.3	**-0.72**
7	Yabloko	0.7	0.6	1.3	1.0	1.6	0.8	1.0	0.8	1.7	1.4	4.0	5.6	0.7	0.6	**0.01**
8	Growth Party	0.5	0.2	0.6	0.3	1.2	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.3	1.3	0.8	0.4	0.3	**0.35**
9	RPSS	0.8	0.7	1.2	0.9	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.7	1.0	0.9	1.7	2.1	0.7	0.6	**0.08**
10	Communists of Russia	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.1	1.1	0.8	1.5	1.2	1.1	0.8	1.3	0.6	0.7	**-0.16**
11	Civic Platform	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	**0.09**
12	Green alternative	1.3	0.5	2.0	1.0	1.3	0.5	0.9	0.5	1.2	0.6	2.2	1.2	1.4	0.6	**0.78**
13	Motherland	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.4	0.7	0.7	**-0.02**
14	Party of Pensioners	3.8	3.5	4.8	5.7	3.1	3.0	1.5	2.3	2.4	3.0	2.4	3.1	2.0	2.1	**-0.41**

On average, United Russia received 6% more under the proportional system in the REV conditions than in the traditional voting. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation in the REV conditions receives an average of 8% less than in traditional areas. Also in the REV, the New People (+2.71%) and the Greens (+1.49) parties received significantly more votes on average. The yellow colour indicates in the table above the results of the parties that gain more in

remote voting. It can be noted that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation did not show leadership in remote voting in any region, and New People in all regions show the best result in remote voting. It is worth noting that parliamentary elections in Russia are held according to a mixed system, and the results are presented above only for the proportional part.

4 Summary

Based on the study, we can conclude that remote electronic voting is scaling, but the share of the electorate interested in it is not so high, on average 7%, with the exception of the city of Moscow, where due to the high activity to attract the population to the REV, almost 26% of the electorate have registered vote outside the polling station. The dynamics of interest in the new form of voting is generally positive. In Moscow, the share of those interested increases by a multiple, in the Kursk and Yaroslavl regions, interest in 2021 compared to 2020 has almost doubled. However, there are exceptions, for example, in the Nizhny Novgorod region, the share of registrations for remote voting decreased by 0.5% in the State Duma Elections in 2021 compared to the All-Russian voting in 2020.

If a voter registers for remote voting, in 9 cases out of 10 he or she will vote in the elections. The turnout in the remote part is above 90%. This is an objective situation, since registration on the REV in itself demonstrates interest in the elections.

There is no correlation between the results of voting in the traditional and remote form, which has already managed to give rise to public discontent and lawsuits at the practical level. The lack of correlation is perceived negatively. One notable trend that has emerged is that the United Russia party performs well in remote voting (+6% on average) and much worse in traditional voting. This gives the opposition political forces a reason to suspect falsifications. However, to date, no form of possible falsification has been proven or confirmed.

5 Conclusions

Interest and trust in remote e-voting can only be increased by ensuring the transparency of procedures. The Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation is working in this direction, inviting development and testing of the system by various categories of specialists. Moreover, the election commission of remote voting TEC REV, as a rule, is formed from representatives of those entities where a new form of voting is being implemented. For further research, three sociological hypotheses can be formulated, due to which the results of remote and traditional voting do not correlate:

- age (the CPRF is voted mainly by the older generation, a large proportion of which is poorly oriented in the information environment; the electorate of different ages votes for United Russia, respectively, most of it has long mastered the digital space. This explains the voting results, where United Russia is positioned much more successfully than the Communist Party in remote voting);
- administrative (if we take into account that there is administrative coercion to participate in the elections of state employees to one degree or another, we can assume that state employees are most inclined to vote using REV, because the authorities want it that way. Considering that the administrative resource works mainly in favour of the ruling party, the electorate votes for it at the REV, and the traditional voting is dominated by the opposition. That is, the administrative resource not only to go to the polls, but also to vote remotely. Voting

for the ruling party, in favour of which the administrative resource works, is additionally ensured by the fear that digital voice may not provide secrecy of the vote);

– campaigning (CPRF, especially in Moscow, urged supporters to vote only traditionally. United Russia, on the contrary, campaigned for a remote format. This, as an additional factor, increased the lack of correlation between traditional and remote results).

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