



Electoral events in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic: remote electronic voting, outdoor voting and other innovations

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Electoral events in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic: remote electronic voting, outdoor voting and other innovations

Iuliia Krivososova

1. Introduction

An all-Russia vote on the question of approving changes to the Constitution (hereinafter ‘the all-Russia vote’) took place on 1 July 2020, following substantial delays and changes in procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 25 March 2020 the President of Russia decreed a postponement (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 25.03.2020 N 205), the all-Russia vote having originally been scheduled for 22 April 2020 (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 17.03.2020 No. 188). Prior to the July date being set (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 01.06.2020 No. 354), on 3 April 2020 the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) announced that the all-Russia vote would be indefinitely postponed.

The all-Russia vote concerns an amendment to the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation. This amendment proposed 206 changes to 46 articles of the Constitution (Kommersant 2020c). All those changes are considered together, as a package, and therefore the changes are referred to as one amendment. The proposed changes vary from establishing that a marriage could be a union only between a man and woman, to major institutional changes including the maximum term of the Russian presidency, which would allow both current and previous Presidents to stay two more terms in power.

This case study shows how a hybrid regime (as defined by The Global State of Democracy Indices, International IDEA n.d.) has held and postponed different levels of elections amid the pandemic (overall, more than 10,000 individual electoral events), and has managed to adapt the international recommendations on holding elections during the pandemic to its own political needs. The case study proceeds as follows: it starts with the legal framework, followed by a section on election administration, then it moves to the measures taken to deliver this voting amid the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact (on both COVID-19 and electoral integrity); the final part focuses on how the practices trialled in the all-Russia vote have since become institutionalized.

2. Legal provisions for the 1 July all-Russia vote

On 14 February 2020, the President issued a Presidential Order to the appropriate public bodies—albeit these are not comprehensively defined in the relevant law—to start preparing for conduct of an ‘all-Russia vote on the question of approval of the changes to the Constitution’ (Rasporjazhenie Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 14.02.2020 No. 32-rp). ‘All-Russia vote’ is a new and unique legal concept for Russia, which has not been used previously and has not been defined by existing legal acts. The term therefore does not straightforwardly identify a type of contest which takes place across the whole of Russia, as opposed to some of the country—as the term might imply. Rather, ‘All Russia voting’ was introduced by Vladimir Putin in the aforementioned Presidential Order (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 17.03.2020 No. 188) with the aim of differentiating it from an election or a referendum. Unlike an election or a referendum, this new form of voting does not have a turnout threshold, can be called by the President, and asks voters to vote on all changes as a package. Moreover, campaigning and conduct of voting are regulated differently: not by a federal law, but by procedures established by the CEC (CEC 2020a). These procedures do not envision any campaigning at all, only provision of information to voters by election management bodies (EMBs).

On 14 March 2020, the President signed the Law on the amendment to the Constitution (Zakon RF o popravke k Konstitucii RF ot 14.03.2020 No. 1-FKZ). Article 2 of this Law established the additional procedure that after it is passed, the Constitutional Court should provide an opinion on the constitutionality of the proposed changes. If the opinion is positive, an all-Russia vote should be organized. If the opinion is negative, voting does not take place and the constitutional amendment is not introduced. Law N1-ΦKЗ places the power of calling an all-Russia vote with the President, who also defines the date of voting, and moreover makes the day of polling a paid holiday—which has not been a norm for electoral events previously. The Law establishes a threshold for approval, namely at least 50 per cent of ballots cast.

Even before the spread of the pandemic in Russia, experts doubted the necessity of the all-Russia vote given that legally, the approval of the population was not required for introducing changes to the Constitution. Therefore, the electoral event served solely a legitimating purpose (Andreychuk 2020). Experts also doubted the necessity of holding the all-Russia vote in the form proposed: voters should be able to vote on each individual proposed change to the Constitution, not on all of them together as a package.

On 16 March 2020, the Constitutional Court issued a positive opinion about the constitutionality of the proposed changes (Zakljuchenie KS RF ot 16.03.2020). The Court clarified that ‘all-Russia vote’ has a special legal nature and, although according to the current legal regulation it is not required in order to make such a constitutional amendment, the President had the right to establish this new instrument with the aim of the constitutional legitimization of the proposed measures.

2.1. Rescheduling; variegated polling

On 17 March 2020, the President of Russia issued a decree setting the voting day for the all-Russia vote as 22 April 2020 (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 17.03.2020 No. 188). Subsequently the CEC set the procedures for the conduct of voting (CEC 2020a). This regulation introduced:

- the option of advance voting, including voting outside polling stations. Advance voting could be offered during three- to seven-day periods, with the length of an advance voting period determined by regional EMBs;

- voting outside polling stations, in outdoor public spaces, to be conducted by at least two EMB members. EMBs to provide at least two observers with an opportunity to reach the voting venue; in their presence, voting could be organized by just one EMB member;
- an EMB registers all voters in the list of voters and uses a separate ballot box for advance ballots than those to be used on the day of polling;
- sanitary requirements for both voters and members of EMBs; and
- continuation of the 'Mobile voter' instrument whereby voters could apply to vote (in person, on election day) at a polling station other than where they were registered to do so.

These measures were reportedly introduced with the aim of ensuring social distancing between voters, in order to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission.

On 25 March 2020, the President issued a new decree introducing changes to the previous decree regarding the polling date (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 25.03.2020 No. 205); this established that a new date for the all-Russia vote would be set by a further presidential decree. Therefore, the changes to the conduct of the all-Russia vote (outlined above) were made five days before the formal announcement on postponement. On the proposal of the Head of the CEC, the President then established (on 1 June) a new date: 1 July 2020 (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 01.06.2020 No. 354). (A chronology of the key events is provided in the Annex A, Table 2.)

On 23 May 2020, the President signed Federal Law No. 154 introducing the option of postal voting and remote electronic voting at all levels of elections, as well as the option of voting outside the polling station, in outdoor public spaces (these have included playgrounds, car parks and the like), and electronic collection of signatures for nomination of candidates at regional elections (Federal'nyj zakon ot 23.05.2020 No. 154-FZ).

The hectic pace of organization for the all-Russia voting resulted in a few legal issues. Some legal acts were introduced shortly before the voting day, making their implementation challenging. For instance, 30 hours before the start of advance voting, the CEC passed a decision that all polling stations should work full hours during advance voting, from 08:00 to 20:00, even though the regional electoral commissions had previously decided to work shorter hours (Golos 2020a).

Additional measures introduced by the CEC on 2 June 2020 (Postanovlenie CIK Rossii ot 02.06.2020 No. 250/1840-7) included extended home voting (meaning that an EMB official visited voters at their residence). The Head of the CEC reported that home voting would be contactless, without direct interaction with voters. Contactless voting is performed in the following way: the electoral commission visits a voter at her/his location, knocks on their door, leaves a ballot and a ballot box in front of the door and stays away from the door at two metres' distance, until a voter returns a filled ballot.

Meanwhile, voting at the local level was still being conducted in the normal fashion despite the development of the COVID-19 pandemic: seven federal subjects of the Russian Federation held local elections and referendums on 22 March 2020 (27 electoral events in total). Between 21 and 57 per cent of eligible voters participated in these subnational electoral events.

2.2. Other electoral events postponed

On 3 April 2020 (i.e. after the decree postponing the all-Russia vote) the CEC decided to postpone elections and voting at all levels, affecting 46 elections in April, 32 in May and 24 in June (Postanovlenie CIK Rossii ot 03.04.2020 No. 246/1820-7). Due to the COVID-19

situation, some of those elections had already been called off by regional and local EMBs (including seven more electoral events scheduled for 29 March 2020); the CEC by their decision approved these postponements retrospectively. Some electoral events were rescheduled to 13 September 2020.

Later, the CEC reported that 94 electoral events in total planned for the period between 5 April and 21 July 2020 were affected by this decision (RIA 2020). Three electoral events nevertheless took place in two federal subjects, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and Pskov region on 12 July. Between then and 30 August no elections were held or planned. A nationwide day of voting, involving 8,970 electoral events (Golos 2020b) remained on schedule for 13 September 2020.

3. Election administration

3.1. Campaigning and voter education

As per the procedures for the conduct of the all-Russia vote, campaigning was not envisioned at all: the CEC regulation (CEC 2020a) only established the process of providing voter information and delegated this responsibility to EMBs and the media. Campaigning was neither explicitly allowed or disallowed, but unlike in an ordinary election or referendum, there was neither allocation of free airtime nor advertising spaces, nor the opportunity to purchase it.

The CEC published information on the proposed changes to the Constitution and explained when and where to vote at the dedicated web portal. The CEC in cooperation with the Association of Volunteer Centres undertook a project entitled the 'Volunteers of the Constitution' from February, whose participants later performed a significant role in informing voters about the all-Russia vote via face-to-face communication (with the usage of personal protective equipment). Over 100,000 volunteers took part, staffing 3,000 information points nationwide that operated on the day of polling and for several weeks beforehand. As with previous electoral events, social media (especially Instagram) played a significant role in 'unofficial' campaigning: celebrities campaigned in favour of the changes to the Constitution, drawing accusations that such activity had been organized and paid for (Znak 2020b). A ban on political campaigning is usually in force from the day before election day in Russia, but was absent in this case.

According to a report by the election watchdog Golos (Golos 2020a), voter education as performed by the CEC and the media was frequently skewed towards covering the cultural and social changes proposed to the Constitution, rather than the political ones. Golos also claimed that the CEC had openly taken a side instead of providing voters with unbiased information or the arguments both for and against the changes. The CEC had earlier removed messages (in favour) from its website, in response to a complaint filed by the 'No' campaign, a movement formed by opposition parliamentarians in January 2020 which had undertaken voter education and disseminated commentaries from lawyers. The 'No' campaign's monitoring activities also identified biased messages on the official website for online voting.

The 'No' campaign's own webpage had been blocked by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) since March 2020. After the day of polling, this movement switched to collecting signatures to file a court case challenging the all-Russia vote results. The 'No' movement had encouraged voter participation, persuaded that a higher turnout would operate to their benefit; opinion polls conducted by the Levada Center (Levada 2020) had suggested that among those who did not plan to vote, 58 per cent were against the amendment to the Constitution, while among those who planned to vote, 55 per cent were in favour. The Communist party also called for voters to vote against the amendment. However, the

opposition was split on this, given that Alexey Navalny and the opposition ‘Yabloko’ party favoured a strategy of non-participation in the vote (Znak 2020a).

3.2. Inter-agency collaboration

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor) into the voting process for the first time. This public body has become one of the key actors in fighting COVID-19 in Russia. Rospotrebnadzor issues regulations regarding testing and quarantining, and provides recommendations to the regions on imposing or lifting restrictions. Together with the CEC, it developed recommendations on conduct of voting during the pandemic (for voters, media representatives and observers), particularly advising on voting in the open air and temperature checks for voters at polling station entrances. Temperature checks were performed by poll workers with the help of thermal scanners. Voters with a high temperature were supposed to vote contactlessly, in a separate room (RBC 2020).

3.3. Pre-electoral COVID-19 testing for EMB staff

Initially, the CEC planned to test all poll workers across Russia for COVID-19, in accordance with recommendations issued by Rospotrebnadzor (Kommersant 2020d). Later, the CEC delegated the decision on the necessity of testing to the regions, on grounds that the spread of COVID-19 varies between regions. In the event, all poll workers and EMB staff were tested in only eight of 85 federal subjects. Election administrators from the roster replaced those diagnosed as being COVID-19 positive (CEC 2020b).

At the beginning of June, some poll workers from all around Russia started a petition against working in the all-Russia vote during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, support for a boycott was negligible: by the day of polling only 533 of around 1.2 million active poll workers signed the petition.

4. Voting arrangements for the 1 July all-Russia vote

4.1. Procedures at polling stations

Advance voting was available from 25 to 30 June 2020. On 1 July all polling stations were open from 08:00 to 20:00 (although with breaks—see below). As for the safety measures against the spread of COVID-19, the CEC presented a significantly new model of polling station:

- entrances and exits should be separated, to avoid bottlenecks; voters’ temperatures to be checked before entry, before providing each voter with a mask, gloves, and a pen;
- a disinfectant mat to be placed at entrances; inside, floor markings indicating the safe distance between voters and poll workers;
- all poll workers obliged to wear personal protective equipment and regularly change it during the working day;
- maximum capacity of polling stations established as just 8–12 voters per hour, for social distancing; furthermore
- every polling station to close for 10 minutes every hour, for the purpose of sanitization.

The last measure raised significant concerns among election observers, who would not be able to observe proceedings during these 10-minute periods.

4.2. Voting from abroad

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia opened 254 polling stations in 144 countries. These polling stations were mostly located at embassies and consulates, but also at military bases, Russian cultural centres, and even at nuclear power plants in Belarus and Iran. In the 2018 Presidential elections, 400 polling stations were opened in 145 countries—in respect of provision, then, Russia was doing relatively well in the pandemic context. Some of those polling stations were open not only on the election day, but also during the period of advance voting (25–30 June 2020). At these polling stations, 146,788 voters cast a ballot.

4.3. Remote electronic voting

The all-Russia vote is the second time that remote electronic voting has been used in Russia. Remote electronic voting means voting over the Internet in an uncontrolled environment, from any location. The first trial of Internet voting in legally binding elections happened in the 2019 Moscow City Duma elections. For the all-Russia vote, the experiment was extended to Moscow and the Nizhny Novgorod region (Table 1). The number of eligible voters in those two federal subjects (over 10 million voters) makes this trial one of the largest trials with Internet voting in the world.

The Internet voting system (IVS) has been developed by the Moscow Department of Information Technology. It works on a private blockchain platform, Exonum. Internet voting was available only during the period of advance voting, 25–30 June 2020. For Internet voters registered in Moscow, the facility was available from 10:00 on 25 June 2020; for those registered in Nizhny Novgorod region—it was available from 14:00. Internet voting finished in both regions at 20:00 on 30 June 2020. On 1 July itself, then, Internet voting was not possible. To vote online or on paper was a voluntary choice. However, multiple instances of coercion to vote electronically were reported to the media (Meduza 2020a), as well as to the CEC.

Residents of Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod region participated in Internet voting upon application. According to the CEC, of around one million voters who applied for Internet voting, 93 per cent cast an e-ballot. Unlike in the 2019 trial, the IVS was not organized at the e-government portal, but at a purpose-built web portal, 2020og.ru. The IVS was device-independent: a voter could cast a vote from any personal computing device (laptops, tablets and desktops, as well as smartphones). To cast a vote electronically, an individual needed to conduct two-step voter identification. It included, first, authentication at the web portal 2020og.ru, and second, identity confirmation by SMS verification. Once an Internet vote has been cast there is no option of re-voting, neither electronically, nor on paper on the election day. Furthermore, voters did not have an opportunity to verify their votes.

4.4. Postal voting

Despite Federal Law No. 154's (Federal'nyj zakon ot 23.05.2020 No. 154-FZ) having introduced the option of postal voting and remote electronic voting at all levels of elections, the CEC decided not to provide postal voting in the all-Russia vote on the ground that this voting channel is outmoded, especially in comparison with the abovementioned 'Mobile voter' instrument (Gazeta 2020). It is up to the CEC to decide whether postal and/or remote electronic voting will be provided in any given election.

4.5. 'Mobile voter'

This instrument, allowing any voter to apply for voting at another polling station than where they are registered, had been already available in Russia for a couple of electoral cycles. Applications had been submitted in advance, by 21 June 2020, either in person or digitally. In the application, a voter indicates at what particular polling station he or she wishes to vote

on the day of polling. Approximately 3.75 million voters (3,767,293, or 3.45 per cent) out of a total electorate of 109 million (109,190,337) applied for this option (Table 1).

4.6. Home voting

The option of home voting has been available to voters in Russia before. However, the all-Russia vote was the first occasion when voters could apply without having to give a reason for doing so. Previously home voting was available only on election day. This time, voters could vote from home during six days of advance voting and, furthermore, in an uncontrolled environment—another first under the new regulation (Table1). Previously, the members of the electoral commission would enter the premises and observe the home voting process. In the all-Russia vote, for safety reasons, the electoral commission stayed outside the premises of a voter, in order to guarantee contactless voting.

Table 1. Applications for special voting channels

Voting channel	Nature of the voting channel	Number of applications
Remote electronic voting (available only in two federal subjects)	Remote Uncontrolled environment	Applied: 1,215,926 (incl. 1,075,488 in Moscow, 140,438 in Nizhny Novgorod region) Granted: 1,190,726 (1,051,155 or 97.74% in Moscow; 139,571 or 99.38% in Nizhny Novgorod region)
'Mobile Voter'	Not remote Controlled environment	3,767,293*
Home voting	Remote Uncontrolled environment	4,425,904**

Source: Central Election Commission.

* The official figure as reported by the CEC on 23 June 2020, <<http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/46634/>>, accessed 27 October 2020.

** Available official figure as reported by the CEC on 24 June 2020, i.e. before applications deadline of 17:00 on 1 July 2020, and not fully reflective of the final number of applications, <<http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/46647/>>, accessed 27 October 2020.

5. Impact of voting arrangements on COVID-19 and on integrity of the all-Russia vote

On 3 July 2020, the CEC announced the final voting results: of 74,114,217 votes cast (a turnout of 68 per cent), 77.9 per cent were in favour of the constitutional amendment. Voting patterns displayed significant change:

- an exceptionally high share of voters cast their ballot in advance of the day of polling—overall, around 80 per cent of the turnout; however, the distribution between regions varied significantly (Golos 2020a); and

- a significant share of the electorate (5.2 per cent) applied to vote from home, either electronically or on paper (1,215,926 and 4,425,904 applications respectively). Approximately 7.6 per cent of the voter turnout.

However, when the CEC organized an opinion poll on social media after the close, asking if voters would find it convenient to be able to vote over more than one day, more than 90 per cent of 1,000 respondents on Twitter and more than 90 per cent of 15,500 respondents on the Russian social network Vkontakte answered ‘No’ (Znak 2020c). On the face of it, voters should find the opportunity to vote on more than one day convenient: this measure increases their chances to find a convenient time to vote. Hence, when voters explicitly state that they do not find that opportunity convenient they might have considerations other than convenience in mind. One such reason could be a lack of trust in the EMB and in its true motivations for making special voting channels available.

Historically, home voting and advance voting have been criticized by independent experts and even by the CEC in Russia (Andreychuk 2020). There is consistently a discrepancy between the electoral results obtained in ordinary polling stations on election days, and those obtained via home and advance voting (as was reported once again in the September 2020 elections). It is more difficult to organize election observation during home and advance voting—which results in even greater lack of transparency than during ordinary voting—and so on this argument, the discrepancy in results is frequently attributed to electoral fraud. The ‘Mobile voter’ instrument has been criticized for the risk of double voting since its introduction (Barabanov, Pushkarskaja and Gorjashko 2020). After the all-Russia vote, the CEC announced a check against double voting on a control group of 23,000 voters (Glikin 2020), but the results of it have not yet been reported. Every instance of double voting will result in a fine imposed on a voter (RUB 30,000), and disciplinary action against members of the respective EMB.

At the end of July, the Levada Center organized a (phone) opinion poll on participation in the all-Russia vote (Levada 2020). According to the opinion poll results, the turnout might have been lower than reported by the CEC. Further, only 60 per cent of respondents reported voting in favour of the amendment, 26 per cent voted against it, and 14 per cent did not reveal their choice. This distribution differs significantly from the one reported by the CEC. The opinion poll also provided the sociological profile of voters who participated in the all-Russia vote: the highest participation rates were among women, over 55 years old, with higher education. This contradicts the expectations that people from the older age groups would be disproportionately deterred from voting due to a higher risk from COVID-19. In the previous national elections—the 2018 Presidential election—participation rates were similar among all age groups (WCIOM 2018). The high participation rate among older age groups could perhaps be explained by the COVID-19 measures and the opportunity to vote in uncontrolled environments (at home, at the mobile polling stations, or at work). The opinion poll emphasizes the high share of respondents who did so (21 per cent), especially among the retired (35 per cent).

The independent election watchdog Golos reported multiple instances of election misconduct: voter impersonation, voter coercion by employers, denial of voting for those quarantining at home (due to the lack of personal protective equipment at the disposal of local EMBs), and ballot box stuffing detected thanks to video monitoring. In rare instances, the results of the all-Russia vote at such polling stations were cancelled. However, these decisions did not have any consequences for the overall results of the all-Russia vote; the results were established without re-running the vote in those areas where the results were cancelled (Golos 2020c).

Regarding Internet voting, its organizers stated that IVS is not entirely a ‘black box’, as it was in the 2019 trial, but a ‘black and white box’ (Kommersant 2020a), meaning that while

some aspects of IVS are available for observation, some other aspects are still not transparent and not comprehensible to voters. Besides, the CEC received a number of complaints (particularly from public sector employees) regarding coercion to register for IVS. Furthermore, the media reported that the personal data of Internet voters (passport information) were available and open to public access (Meduza 2020b). The 2019 trial with Internet voting had also experienced leakage of voters' personal data.

In the absence of the centralized monitoring of the spread of COVID-19 among poll workers, we need to refer to individual reports. According to independent election watchdog Golos reports, at two polling stations in Saint Petersburg one member per each electoral commission was diagnosed COVID-19 positive during the period of advance voting. As a result, two other members of the same commission refused to work any longer. In Omsk, Altai and Stavropol regions, where all poll workers were obliged to undergo testing, EMB members tested positive (17, 13 and 50 of them, respectively) before the start of the voting (Taiga.info 2020). At one polling station in Moscow, the local head of the EMB was diagnosed with COVID-19 but kept working (Kataev 2020).

Regarding the spread of COVID-19 among the population, by 1 July new daily confirmed cases in Russia had peaked (on 12 May 2020) and had since been decreasing. As of September 2020, it had continued to do so. The occasional spikes were explained by reporting specifics. However, the number of daily confirmed new cases was 1.19 times higher on 1 July than on the originally planned day of polling, 22 April (see Table 2). There are no public reports of voters having been infected with COVID-19 in the all-Russia vote.

At first glance, the mitigation measures taken seem to have followed the recommendations of major international organizations, and those of academia (Wolf and Kalandadze 2020; James and Alihodzic 2020; Krimmer, Duenas-Cid and Krivonosova 2020): ensure social distancing at the polling stations, prolong the voting period, and provide options for remote voting. Indeed, Russia had all of this. However, the way these actions implemented imposed a significant threat to the integrity of the all-Russia vote, trust in which had already been low. Furthermore, it goes against the principle of electoral law stability: that new laws should not be introduced earlier than one year before election day. According to the independent election watchdog Golos, the all-Russia vote failed to meet over 30 international norms and recommendations on the conduct of voting (Golos 2020d).

6. Effects on the 13 September 2020 subnational elections

Some of the practices trialled in the all-Russia vote have been already institutionalized into law for future electoral events. On 31 July 2020, the President signed Federal Law No. 267 (Federal'nyj zakon ot 31.07.2020 No. 267-FZ) introducing the option of three-day voting at all levels of elections, particularly specifying that voting could be organized in outdoor public spaces. Legally, this new instrument abolishes the practice of advance voting, while in practice, it extends the eligibility to participate in advance voting to all voters (which was previously only available for those with good reasons). Some experts believe that the extension of the election day to three days might make voter coercion easier, especially in regards to forced voting at work: in Russia, election days are on a Sunday, so that a three-day election day would guarantee that voting happens during a working day as well (Lyubarev 2020).

On the nationwide voting day on 13 September 2020, voters cast a ballot at national (by-election to the State Duma), regional (regional dumas and gubernatorial elections) and local elections. These elections took place according to the new rules: voting lasted three days, with advance voting taking place on 11 and 12 September 2020. This created some challenges to election administrators: most of the polling stations were situated in schools, where both 11 and 12 September were studying days. The Ministry of Education did not

have a central strategy for addressing this issue, so every region reacted differently. Some established these days as a holiday for pupils, some organized classes outdoors, while others again conducted both activities simultaneously, teaching pupils and conducting elections (Kommersant 2020b). The IVS has been used in these elections as well. Polling places functioned in line with the same measures against the spread of COVID-19 as had been established by the CEC for the all-Russia vote.

Annex A

Table 2. Chronology of key electoral events during the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia, 2020

Date	Event	Daily confirmed new cases of COVID-19
14 February	Presidential Order to public bodies initiating preparation for conduct of an ‘all-Russia vote on the question of approval of the changes to the Constitution’ (hereinafter the ‘all-Russia vote’)	0
14 March	President signs the Law on the amendment to the Constitution	15
16 March	Constitutional Court provides a positive Internet opinion on constitutionality of proposed changes to the Constitution	4
17 March	Presidential decree sets the voting day for the all-Russia vote as 22 April 2020	30
20 March	The CEC sets the procedures for the conduct of the all-Russia vote, introducing advance voting, voting outside polling stations, requirements of the sanitary measures for both voters and members of EMBS, and the continuation of the usage of the ‘Mobile voter’ instrument	52
22 March	Seven federal subjects hold local elections and referendums (27 electoral events in total)	53
25 March	Presidential decree postpones the all-Russia vote	57
3 April	The CEC postpones elections at all levels during April–July 2020	771
22 April	Originally scheduled date of the all-Russia vote	5,642
23 May	President signs Federal Law No. 154 introducing the option of postal voting and remote electronic voting at all levels of elections, as well as the option of voting outside the polling station in outdoor public spaces, and of electronic signature collection for nomination of candidates at regional elections	8,894
1 June	President establishes a new date for the all-Russia vote: 1 July 2020	9,268
Undefined	Pre-vote COVID-19 testing for members of EMBS	
25–30 June	Advance voting for the all-Russia vote (including voting from abroad); Internet voting for the all-Russia vote in two federal subjects (Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod region)	7,176–6,719
1 July	Rescheduled date for the all-Russia vote (held as planned)	6,693
3 July	The CEC announces the final electoral results	6,760
12 July	Three electoral events take place in two federal subjects, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and Pskov region	6,611
24–25 July	Levada Center organizes a phone opinion poll on participation in the all-Russia vote	5,848–5,811
31 July	President signs Federal Law No. 267 introducing the option of three-day voting at all levels of elections, and specifying that voting can be organized in outdoor public spaces	5,509
30 August	By-election scheduled in one federal unit	
11–12 September	Advance voting for the nationwide voting day, for which 8,970 electoral events are scheduled	
13 September	Nationwide voting day, 8,970 scheduled electoral events	

Source: [COVID-19 data]: Ritchie, H. et al., ‘Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)—the data’, <<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-data?country=~RUS>>, accessed 2 October 2020.

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Legal framework

Zaključenje o sootvetstvii polozhenijam glav 1, 2 i 9 Konstitucii Rossijskoj Federacii ne vstupivshih v silu polozhenij Zakona Rossijskoj Federacii o popravke k Konstitucii Rossijskoj Federacii «O sovershenstvovanii regulirovanija otdel'nyh voprosov organizacii i funkcionirovanija publichnoj vlasti», a takzhe o sootvetstvii Konstitucii Rossijskoj Federacii porjadka vstuplenija v silu stat'i 1 dannogo Zakona v svjazi s zaprosom Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii

Zakon RF o popravke k Konstitucii RF ot 14.03.2020 No. 1-FKZ "O sovershenstvovanii regulirovanija otdel'nyh voprosov organizacii i funkcionirovanija publichnoj vlasti"

Postanovlenie CIK Rossii ot 02.06.2020 No. 250/1840-7 «O vnesenii izmenenija v Porjadok obshherossijskogo golosovanija po voprosu odobrenija izmenenij v Konstituciju Rossijskoj Federacii»

Postanovlenie CIK Rossii ot 03.04.2020 No. 246/1820-7 "Ob otlozhenii golosovanija na vyborah, referendumah na territorii rjada sub#ektov Rossijskoj Federacii"

Rasporjazhenie Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii ot 14.02.2020 No. 32-rp "Ob organizacii podgotovki provedenija obshherossijskogo golosovanija po voprosu odobrenija izmenenij v Konstituciju Rossijskoj Federacii"

Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 17.03.2020 No.188 "O naznachanii obshherossijskogo golosovanija po voprosu odobrenija izmenenij v Konstituciju Rossijskoj Federacii"

Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 25.03.2020 No. 205 "O perenose daty obshherossijskogo golosovanija po voprosu odobrenija izmenenij v Konstituciju Rossijskoj Federacii"

Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 01.06.2020 No. 354 "Ob opredelenii daty provedenija obshherossijskogo golosovanija po voprosu odobrenija izmenenij v Konstituciju Rossijskoj Federacii"

Federal'nyj zakon ot 23.05.2020 No. 154-FZ "O vnesenii izmenenij v otdel'nye zakonodatel'nye akty Rossijskoj Federacii"

Federal'nyj zakon ot 31.07.2020 No. 267-FZ "O vnesenii izmenenij v otdel'nye zakonodatel'nye akty Rossijskoj Federacii"

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About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

What do we do?

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work. International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

Where do we work?

Our headquarters are located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

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