

United Russia Claims Landslide Win

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United Russia's leader in the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, seen in this file photograph, said in a statement Monday that his party had strengthened its grip on power by winning 56 percent of the weekend S.

Porter

United Russia on Monday claimed a landslide victory in weekend elections in 77 regions, while rivals complained that the ruling party had eliminated all candidates who posed any threat by staging the dirtiest election campaign in its history.

Analysts said the results of Sunday's elections offered a picture of how State Duma elections would play out next year and the presidential vote in 2012.

United Russia strengthened its grip on power by winning 56 percent of the weekend vote, a modest 4 percent increase from the last regional elections in March, Boris Gryzlov, who heads United Russia's faction in the State Duma, said in a statement Monday.

The average turnout was 49.1 percent, nearly 10 percent higher than in March, the Central Elections Commission said in a statement. It said United Russia was supported by a majority

of voters in the seven regional legislative elections, while the Communists placed second.

The leaders of the Communist, A Just Russia and Liberal Democratic parties denounced the elections as unfair and promised to mount challenges of the results. But none threatened to stage a walkout in the State Duma like the one they oversaw after fraud-tinged regional elections in October 2009.

Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov called the election campaign “the dirtiest of all held in the post-Yeltsin period.”

“The ruling party showed its worst features,” Zyuganov said in televised remarks.

United Russia was formed in December 2001, nearly two years after Boris Yeltsin handed the presidency to Vladimir Putin.

Zyuganov also said his party would appeal to the European Court of Human Rights over election results in the cities of Krasnodar; Chapayevsk in the Samara region; and Tuva because of multiple violations.

United Russia's biggest victory was in the Tuva republic, where it swept 78.8 percent of the vote for the regional legislature, while the only regional poll where the party scored less than 50 percent was in the Novosibirsk region, where it got 44.8 percent, the Central Elections Commission said.

In addition to Tuva and Novosibirsk, voters elected regional legislatures in the regions of Magadan, Chelyabinsk, Belgorod and Kostroma, where United Russia won a majority of all the seats, the elections commission said.

In Tuva, the only other party that will receive seats in the regional legislature is A Just Russia, which won 10.37 percent of the vote. A Just Russia is a pseudo-opposition party headed by Sergei Mironov, a close ally of Putin, who heads United Russia.

In the other regional legislative elections, A Just Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Communists walked away with a handful of seats each.

United Russia scored its highest results in the town of Izhevsk in the Udmurtia republic, where election officials reported that it swept 99.9 percent of the vote for the city legislature.

In Samara, the only regional capital without a United Russia mayor, United Russia's candidate Dmitry Azarov won about 67 percent, leaving incumbent mayor and Just Russia member Viktor Tarkhov in distant second with 18.2 percent, with 98 percent of the vote counted.

Mironov, the Just Russia leader, said Monday that United Russia used dirty tricks to increase its clout ahead of the 2012 election. He said his party filed more than 200 complaints about violations during voting Sunday and pledged to push for a ban on absentee ballots, which critics say have been used to inflate turnout figures and election results for United Russia in the past.

“I'm completely sure that the real results of our party and, primarily, of United Russia are absolutely different [than what was reported by election officials] in all the Russian regions,”

Mironov said, Interfax reported.

A Just Russia, however, showed comparatively good results, winning, for example, 16 percent of the vote in the Novosibirsk region's legislative election.

Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy also said his party has found numerous violations.

“Everything was there: bribery, blackmail and threats,” Zhirinovskiy told reporters.

He said United Russia had received so-called administrative resources but, unlike other recent elections, so had A Just Russia.

Deputy Interior Minister Mikhail Sukhodolskiy said 17 criminal cases have been opened in connection with Sunday's elections.

The head of Chuvashia's election committee, Lyudmila Linik, said she was resigning after 15 years because the election system in her region has been "undermined" and is now influenced by unspecified political forces, Interfax reported. The region hosted about 600 minor elections in towns and settlements.

Alexei Titkov, an analyst at the Institute of Regional Politics, said United Russia had acted tougher than at the March elections and had prevented all “undesirable” rival candidates from running.

“Sunday's elections are a feeble semblance of what will transpire in 2012, when more agitation will be used,” Titkov said by telephone.

Meanwhile, police detained the suspected killer of Abdulmuslim Nurmagomedov, head of the Dagestani settlement of Khadzhal'makhi, along with several other suspects accused of stealing 4,500 ballots from a local polling station Saturday night, Central Elections Commission chief Vladimir Churov said Monday. He did not elaborate. Nurmagomedov was shot dead Sunday afternoon during a clash that broke out as officials tried to bring 4,500 new ballots into the polling station to replace the ones that had been stolen.

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