



Election Webcams Reveal a Slice of Russian Life

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True conditions at polling stations shown in this private Chechen home.

The costly web cameras put in place in Russia's polling stations to combat fraud served a dual purpose over the weekend, giving viewers an unusual glimpse of the lives of people all over the country — from small Chechen villages to Tyumen nightlife and beyond.

Anyone with an Internet connection could rove the land, spying on a range of buildings that work as polling stations during elections — from schools to sanatoriums and even private homes.

With the cameras going online Saturday, viewers could see what went on before the ballot boxes began to be used.

In Tyumen, a party at a polling station quickly went viral as the 60th birthday party of a man called Nikolai was caught on camera, complete with slow "sexy" dancing and vodka-drinking toasts to Nikolai's young age.

Others showed schools still in use. One had young boys fighting and rolling on the floor, according to news reports.

That was just the aperitif as Sunday saw more than 2.5 million people register to view the web feeds, Itar-Tass reported. At its peak, there were 400,000 viewers on the site at once.

The most popular ones were those in places that put on a show for the election with dancing and national costumes, said Igor Shchyogolev, the press and communications minister, Itar-Tass reported.

Stations in Sochi and Chechnya proved popular and video of a voter — who bore a striking resemblance to Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov — dancing the traditional Chechen dance, the lezginka, quickly went viral with people wondering if it was actually the head of the republic. It wasn't.

One of the most widely discussed polling stations was a private house in the village of Meseda in Chechnya, where one of the elections commission officials, a woman in her 50s, could be seen with her husband and baby, with a blue sheet hung up to hide the voting "booth." The baby proved especially popular among viewers and users of Twitter.

Another polling station was crammed into a shop, just to the right of a display of piles of oranges. Another showed a young couple making out before voting began, and another revealed the legs of a sleeping man sticking out from a voting-booth curtain the night before the polls opened.

Many Russian media outlets made lists of their favorite polling stations.

One Altai newspaper that made a list, added sadly: "In the Altai republic, no such charming situations could be found." It also noted that in most cases, there was nothing to see. It did add, though, that in Kyzyl-Suzak a man could be seen watching television.

Others just had fun with the videos.

"There is a new game: stand in front of the camera at a polling station and ask to be photographed via Webvybory.ru," Roman Zadorozhny wrote on Twitter.

In a video posted on YouTube, a man is shown walking toward the curtained-off area, stopping and then starting to dance. He then dances in to vote behind the curtain, despite a policewoman coming up to him. A bit later he dances out, places his vote in the ballot box and leaves.

Somebody else posted a video of themselves on YouTube as they watch a polling station on the Webvybory site. A woman can be seen on the phone via the webcam, and they scream directions on how to look at the camera. The video is called "My mom at the polling station."

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