

Moscow Voters Explain Their Choices

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Moscow held its first mayoral election in nearly 10 years on Sunday, and voter turnout amounted to less than 30 percent, according to exit polls.

The contenders included acting Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Communist Ivan Melnikov, Liberal Democrat Mikhail Degtyarev, Yabloko party chairman Sergei Mitrokhin, and A Just Russia's Nikolai Levichev.

Moscow Times reporters interviewed voters throughout the city, and the results are provided below.

Metro Yasenevo

Of six voters interviewed outside four polling stations housed in school #790 near the Yasenevo metro station in southwestern Moscow, four people of different generations and gender said they had cast their ballots for acting Mayor Sergei Sobyenin. The interviewees explained that they knew little about the other candidates and mentioned Sobyenin's

accomplishments in building roads, parking lots and children's playgrounds in their district.

Nina Labenskaya, 66, a pensioner, said Sobyenin "is sorting out the mess in the city," building roads and taking down street advertisements.

"Moscow is starting to look like Moscow again," Labenskaya told The Moscow Times.

Maria Komolykh, 38, a housewife, also praised Sobyenin for road construction, saying his government erected playgrounds and enlarged Gorky Park.

"We don't know the other candidates at all," Komolykh said about herself and her teenage daughter, who accompanied her.

Her daughter, who didn't identify herself, said "Navalny only yells," while Komolykh added that Navalny was "serving jail time."

Mikhail, 50, who declined to give his last name, said Sobyenin was a "good administrator" while the other candidates had no experience as mayors.

"I don't understand, why propose alternative variants for the city's development when there is a successfully functioning mechanism?" Mikhail said.

Of the two other voters interviewed in Yasenevo, one said he supported Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin, while the other said she cast her ballot for opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Ilya, 30, an advertising manager who refused to give his last name, said he voted for Mitrokhin because he wasn't familiar with the other candidates.

Sobyenin continued the plan for the city's development adopted under the previous mayor Yury Luzhkov, and didn't propose anything new, Ilya said. Candidates from the Liberal Democratic and the Communist parties were "Putin's people," he said, while Navalny was "not a bad guy" but had a "damaged reputation" because of his criminal prosecution.

Anna Sviyazova, 18, a student, said she had wanted to vote for Sobyenin but changed her mind at the last moment and voted for Navalny.

"Sobyenin organized cool City Day festivities on Saturday, but at the last moment I decided to vote for Navalny because I am curious what will happen if he wins," she said.

Polling Station # 1055, metro Pervomayskaya

One observer did not have any major complaints, but mentioned a potentially problematic situation: Quite a few people who came to the station were not on the official lists but said they lived in the area and had to be added to the lists by hand, he said. He added that he was monitoring the situation and would inform other observers if it got out of hand.

A pensioner outside said she voted for Sobyenin "because it's already predetermined who will win." Her general sentiment about the election campaign was that "they are all thieves and liars. They haven't done anything for us." She refused to give a name.

Polling station #1044, metro Pervomayskaya

One observer said everything is in order, but the turnout is low. They had 100 voters by 11 a.m. but there were 1,900 people on the list. There was also an incident where an elderly man came with two passports, one for himself and another for his wife, who he said was in the hospital. He wanted the elections commission to give him two ballots and they almost did until an observer butted in.

There were six observers at this station, which seems overwhelming considering it's one of the smallest stations in terms of voter turnout.

A pensioner at this station, Tamara, criticized the government but refused to give her full name because she was afraid local authorities would never repair her heating pipes, which she said now function at 12 to 14 degrees Celsius in the winter.

“These are different times. Everyone is ready to cheat you,” she said.

Three people at the station complained that Navalny “goes in and out of prison. At least Sobyenin did something.” They said they voted for Levichev and Melnikov.

Valentin Utkin, a pensioner, said: “I voted for Sobyenin because I feel that he will really take good care of us. He is already doing a lot.”

When asked what he thought about Sobyenin not participating in the debates, he said, “The debates are not important. What's important is that he is showing a lot of care for us. I wish him all the best and a lot of happiness in his personal family life.”

Polling station #31, metro Baumanskaya

Polina Zybunikhina, an observer and student, said most of the people who came to her station were pensioners, and she expected turnout to be low (only 107 voters out of 1079 residents by noon). There were four observers at this station, but two disappeared at some point, and when a Moscow Times reporter spoke to Zybunikhina, she was basically working alone. She said that there were no incidents at her station except for the elections commission at first not wanting to give her a protocol of the vote. She filed a request, however, meaning they would have to give it to her after the votes are in, she said.

Polling station #27, metro Baumanskaya

Anton Kalimov, an observer from Navalny's campaign, said people were complaining that they were not well informed. Kalimov put up posters on 27 residential buildings yesterday at 2 p.m. to tell people where they should go to vote, but this morning when he was walking to the polling station, he noticed that many of them had been torn down.

At 7 a.m., Kalimov also saw stickers for one candidate on a row of lamp posts. At first he would not say which candidate was illustrated, but then said that it was for a candidate he supported.

“This candidate is a principled person and would never show such blatant disregard for election rules. It was clearly a provocation from one side.”

Kalimov saw some minor violations at his polling station, but did not mention them to the elections commission because he didn't want to ruin relations with them. One of the

violations was ballots not being kept in a safe, he said.

Curiously, there was an observer from Sobyenin's campaign sitting on the opposite side of the room. She was very calm, not taking notes of any kind. She had a very vague understanding of how many people had come in to vote and said there were not problems at all. Kalimov, on the other hand, was very alert, using a vote ticker, and he kept jumping up to verify the numbers recorded on the machine.

Alexander, a Russian immigrant to America, came to the polling station with his politically-savvy wife.

"She told me that if I didn't go, she'd divorce me. I am scared of her," he said, adding "when I vote in America, I am confident that my vote will count. Here, my vote means nothing."

"In Russia, you have to choose according to the principle, who is the best of the worst," he said.

Polling station #56, metro Krasnoselskaya

Sergei Isaenko, an observer from Navalny's campaign and a student, said: "It's just pensioners who come in. The young people make up 20 percent at the most."

Margarita Tomina, a pensioner, said she voted for Sobyenin.

"He seems to have done some good things for the city. Moscow got cleaner. My only request to him is to put up benches in the Mitino cemetery. It is an awful long walk to the graves and there are no benches on the way so you have to go and sit in other people's plots."

Polling station #57, metro Krasnoselskaya

People have to climb to the second floor to get to the voting booths. An observer later said that 90 percent of the people who voted were pensioners, adding that they expected less than 50 percent turnout at this polling station.

Polling station #110, metro Taganskaya

Varvara Mikhailova, an observer who previously worked as an observer in St. Petersburg at the presidential elections, said: "It is much easier to work here. The people on the elections commission are friendly. When some questions came up, we sat together like civilized people, read laws and came to a consensus." It was only pensioners who voted up until 12 p.m., but younger people started coming in the afternoon.

Mikhailova had no complaints about the elections process, saying the ballots were in a safe, but she added "The main problem is that the right of secret voting has been broken. We have machines to count the votes and people are not allowed to bend their ballots. Whether you want to or not, you see how they voted. Maybe it's because they try to put it the wrong side up into the machine or just the way they carry the ballots, but from where I'm standing, I can see all the votes."

Nina Nikolayevna: "I wasn't afraid and voted for Navalny."

“I don't like that Sobyenin used administrative resources to send out pamphlets to everybody's homes. I worked as a designer and know how much these things cost. The paper was good, the print. Plus, there were people paid by the state who brought these pamphlets to our houses.”

Nikolayevna was also unhappy that Sobyenin didn't participate in the debates. She was afraid to say her name because her son works in a state agency.

“Putin is a very vindictive person,” she said.

Polling station #46, metro Serpukhovskaya

One observer said he didn't notice any violations, but one of two voting ballot machines had broken and they were trying to fix it. Most voters were elderly, he said.

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