

Bear Boosts Local Voter Turnout in Russian Regional Election (Video)

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Amid reports of widespread violations marring Russia's regional elections, Sunday's vote also made headlines for another reason after two bears made an appearance at different polling stations.

An animal trainer in the town of Slantsy in the Leningrad region on Sunday morning walked into the local polling station with a brown bear on a leash, where the animal was treated to some sweets by election workers, according to news reports and videos posted online.

The bear was granted the "opportunity" to vote, but did not cast an actual ballot, the trainer said in a video after leaving the polling station.

Allowing the bear to cast a real vote would "require some paperwork," the animal trainer said. "Only a very minor thing remains — [for the bear] to become an [official] resident of the Leningrad region."

A second bear showed up in Siberia's Omsk region in the village of Sedelnikovo, ambling out of the taiga unaccompanied, Russian media reported.

The bear drew local residents out of their homes to gawk and cast their ballots, the regional elections commission chief, Alexei Nesterenko, was cited as saying by local Super Omsk news portal.

The turnout in the Sedelnikovskaya district, where the village is located, had reached 63.6 percent by 7:30 p.m. Sunday, compared to 32.9 percent in the Omsk region as a whole, according to elections commission figures.

"We were very much worried that [the bear] would drive down our voter turnout. In the end, it was one of the highest turnout results [in the region,]" Nesterenko was cited as saying by state NTV television Sunday.

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