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Putin's reelection victory in the Russian Federation

Pramen

20 March 2024

No one doubted the ability of Vladimir Putin and his cohort to draw a 50%+ figure to maintain their own power. It would be naive to believe that any action in the controlled environment of the polling stations could affect the percentages displayed on the screens of the Russian empire and the entire planet. Whether you spoil a ballot, write a message on it, or nuke a polling station, Putin will still consistently win.

Smart voting, apps on phones and even prayers will not be able to influence the results of the vote.

But that's not the victory we want to talk about today. Rather, we want to talk about the political victory around mobilization before the election itself. It has been clear to an outside observer for months that the Russian opposition would try to use at least partially the scenario of the Belarus protests in the hope of moving something. Show up at the polling stations at noon – this is the same moment of decentralized assembly that became one of the key organizing factors for the post-August 9 protests.

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But unfortunately, the analysis of the Russian opposition largely ignored the success story of the Belarusian uprising and decided to use rather symbolic parts of the protest against Lukashenko: from collecting signatures for a “new” politician, to strange attempts to choose a right-wing politician allowed by Putin’s regime as a protest candidate.

In Belarus in 2020, street mobilization began almost on the first day of the announcement of the elections themselves. And the main role in preparing for the uprising against the dictatorship was played not by a few well-known politicians, but by a significant number of self-organized groups throughout the country, even in small towns and villages.

On the one hand the relatively tight control of the street by the regime prevented any organization inside Russia. But on the other hand, the situation in many regions is not much different in terms of repression than in Belarus in the spring of 2020. Yes, political opponents are detained and left for 24 hours, and somewhere for years. People leave the state because of political repression, and violence against individuals is largely ignored by the majority of the population.

The only difference is that while in Belarus there were new political forces and a new desire to change things, today’s liberal Russian opposition is a continuation of the tradition of vaguely resisting Putin’s rise to power. Instead of creating a revolutionary movement, the opposition continues to watch videos by bloggers like Katz, hoping to find some explanation for their own helplessness and the stagnation of the entire society.

In such an atmosphere, it’s quite easy for Putin to win – he doesn’t even need complete control over the vertical as in Belarus. Despite all the chaos inside Russia, Putin continues to win the struggle for power not only because of the strength of his own fist, but also because of the weakness of opponents of the authoritarian regime.

The 2024 elections once again showed the powerlessness of the Russian opposition in matters of political mobilization. A very modest number of people came out to the protest on Sunday (even compared to the thousands who came to Navalny's funeral). Yes, there were pictures of queues from abroad, but it remains a mystery to us why one should queue at an embassy in Warsaw if one already knows the results, and one does not need to find any "loopholes" to gather opponents of the regime.

Attempts by the opposition to show that not all Russians support Putin have recently turned into some kind of parody of political struggle, and instead of real change, it is enough to say that a few hundred people came to the action to succeed. It is important to learn to rejoice in small things?

Putin won this cycle of political struggle with a crushing effect on the opposition – Navalny's assassination provoked quiet mourning instead of anger, and the misanthropic ideology of the Russian world continues to be an everyday reality.

Everyone understands perfectly well that there are enough people in Russia who oppose the war, and even in many ways, that number can affect the end of the regime. But at this stage there is no political force within Russia itself capable of mobilizing the protest potential, and the longer the war lasts, the less chance there is of overthrowing the regime. Russia, no matter how fascist it was, allowed various political forces to organize relatively freely for quite a long time. Even today, political projects that clearly contradict the Kremlin's ideology continue to exist within the country. But the further into the crisis, the less probability of any social revolt against the regime.

For Belarusians abroad and inside Lukashenko's dictatorship, the elections in Russia do not give any hope for political changes in the region. Yes, in 2025 there will be a new re-election of Lukashenko. Yes, historically this period has been the most unstable for the regime and has attracted new generations of opponents of the dictatorship into political movements. But we continue to see that any changes in Belarus are impossi-

ble without the collapse of Putin's regime. Even if Belarusians take to the streets with rocks and sticks, Putin will not allow Lukashenko to lose power.

And if the Russian society is not ready to engage in the overthrow of Putin, the only way out for us is to support the Ukrainian resistance in the war with the so-called Russian world. Putin's military defeat and the political collapse of the Russian dictatorship will be an important contribution to freeing Belarus from dictatorship.