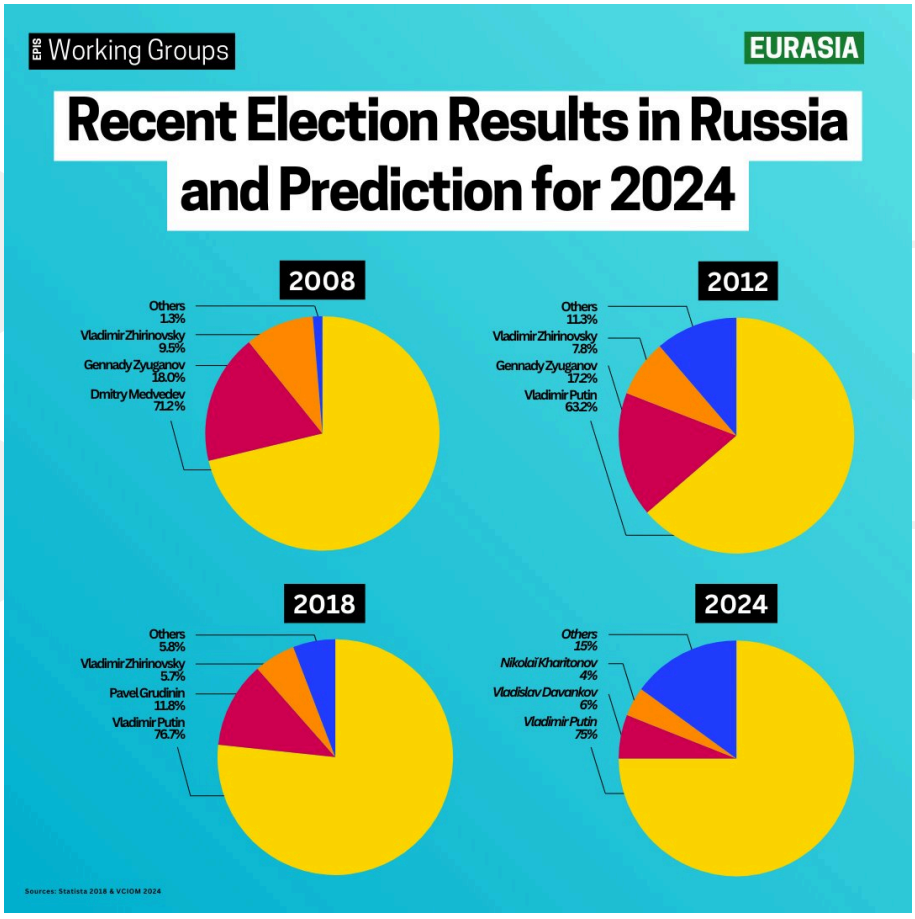
Behind the Ballots of the 2024 Russian Presidential Election

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Bjoern Kuehn and Marijn Rijk



голосуй как хочешь, а итоги будут как всегда – Vote as you wish, but the result will be as always

It is the year of elections. Countries that are home to more than four billion people will get to decide on their new political leaders and respective governments. Among these, the next significant election will be the Russian presidential election. The upcoming Russian presidential election is over-shadowed by Putin's influence and limited opposition. The authoritarian leader is expected to affirm his power despite accusations of fraud and

repression. The international community's eyes are on Russia's upcoming elections due to the predictive aspect they have since his campaign shapes his future agenda.

To voting booth or bin

Over three consecutive days, from March 15 to 17, around 112.3 million Russians will have the chance to vote at polling stations, both in Russia itself and in the annexed regions of Ukraine. Despite the semblance of competition, President Putin's political influence looms large amidst a period of geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and shifting global alliances. Due to the 2020 constitutional revisions, Vladimir Putin will ultimately be able to run for office a fifth time. Thus, Putin, the current president of the Russian Federation, will have to "contend" against three other candidates, none of whom have criticised Putin for his actions. The lineup of electoral contenders includes Leonid Slutsky of the Liberal Democratic Party, Nikolay Kharitonov of the Communist Party, and Vladislav Davankov of the New People. While there are certainly more possible contenders within the oppressed Russian political arena, the Central Election Commission has authorised only these four candidates to be on the ballot for the upcoming presidential election. Consequently, this limited selection reflects the harsh political reality in Russia, in which opposition figures face suppression, harassment, and oftentimes a lengthy prison sentence. The recent passing of Alexei Navalny, a widely recognized opponent of the Russian government, subsequent to an incident where he lost consciousness during a routine walk, epitomises the perceived disregard and audaciousness evident within the governance practices of the Russian regime.

Power play in the Kremlin: A barometer for political stability or instability?

Despite large-scale criticism about the presidential election's legality and overall fairness, specifically pointing to past electoral fraud, media control, and political repression, one may argue that the Russian presidential election will still be important for a number of reasons. To begin with, the election results will determine whether Vladimir Putin will serve a fifth term in office, demonstrating his legitimacy, which would make him the longest-serving head of the Russian state since Joseph Stalin. Besides, the election results will reflect the legitimacy and impartiality of the country's electoral system, which has been questioned and criticised repeatedly since the revision of the constitution. Finally, it will reflect to what extent Vladimir Putin can maintain his fierce political grip on the Russian state and whether his bizarre expansionary visions, which have been manifested with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, are supported by the general population. Thus, although the result of the 2024 Russian presidential election will most likely not end in an electoral surprise, its outcome will give, albeit to a limited

extent due to state repression, vital insights into the current status quo of the Russian state amidst an ongoing war.

Looking forward: Anticipating the aftermath of the 2024 Russian presidential election

The outcome of the election is, by all accounts, a given. Instead, over the next few days and weeks, the focus of analysis should rather be shifted towards the manner in which Putin's campaign unfolds and gets legitimised. Ultimately, this will offer insights into his forthcoming political agenda during the next term. Subsequently, one ought to anticipate Putin to persist in portraying himself as unrivalled and dominant in manoeuvring the Russian state.

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