



ZIMBABWE ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION

REPORT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION 15 – 17 MARCH 2024



18 March 2024

The Honourable Chairperson
Attention: Honourable Ella PAMFILOVA
Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation
Moscow
Russian Federation

Dear Honourable Chairperson,

**PRESENTATION OF THE OBSERVATION REPORT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION 15 – 17 MARCH 2024**

On behalf of the Zimbabwe Election Observation Mission, it is my singular honour to present to you, Honourable Chairperson, our election observation report.

I wish to acknowledge your considerate invitation extended to the Government of Zimbabwe, Parliament of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to observe the 2024 Presidential elections of the Russian Federation; and to appreciate the hospitality of the Russian people extended to the Zimbabwean delegation.

It is our fervent hope as the Zimbabwe delegation that the contents of this report will provide valuable insights that will contribute to the deepening and strengthening of grassroots democracy in future Presidential elections in the Russian Federation.

Honourable Chairperson, please accept assurances of our highest consideration.

Honourable Justice Priscilla Makanyara Chigumba
Head of Mission
Zimbabwe Election Observation Mission

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Introduction

This report is a summary of findings of the Zimbabwe Election Observer Mission of the Russian Federation's Presidential elections which were held from 15 – 17 March 2024.

The Zimbabwe Election Observer Mission was appointed by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe His Excellency, Dr. Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, in response to invitations from the Government of the Russian Federation, the Federation Council, the State Duma, and the Central Elections Commission. Thus, the delegation from Zimbabwe comprises of officials from the government of Zimbabwe, Parliament of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission with Honourable Justice Priscilla Makanyara Chigumba as Head of Delegation.

The invitations from state institutions of the Russian Federation and the participation of the Zimbabwean delegation as observers of the 2024 Presidential Election in the Russian Federation is a testimony of the trust and good relations that the two countries enjoy dating back to the days of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe.

In conducting its observation mandate, the Zimbabwean delegation was guided by principles of impartiality and non-interference in the management of electoral processes. The delegation was clear on the distinction between election observation and election monitoring.

Background Information on Presidential Elections in Russia

Legal Framework

The legal framework on elections in the Russian Federation comprises of the Constitution which lays the foundation of credible elections through the proclamation of rights and obligations of citizens and Federal Laws which detail specific aspects of election management. Article 3.3 of the Constitution notes that the supreme direct expression of the power of the people shall be expressed through referenda and free elections. Chapter 2 of the Constitution outlines rights which make it possible to conduct credible elections. These include the right to freedom of conscience (Article 28), right to information and prohibition of propaganda and censorship (Article 29), right to association (Article 30), right to assemble and hold rallies (Article 31), and right to elect and be elected (Article 32.2). In addition to the provisions of the Constitution, Federal Law No. 67-FZ of 2002 and Federal Law No. 19-FZ of 2003 give further guidelines on electoral rights and on election of the President of the Russian Federation respectively.

Political and Security Environment

The political and security environment prior to an election is a significant predictor of participation in an election. The general political and security environment prior to the presidential election in the Russian Federation was free, fair and peaceful with limited visibility of security personnel.

Media monitoring

Federal Law in the Russian Federation mandates the Central Election Commission to form a media monitoring group to account for airtime used to cover election candidates by State Public Broadcasting Companies in terms of Federal Law No. 95-FZ of 2009 On Guarantees of Equal Coverage of

Parliamentary Parties' Activities by State Public Broadcasting Companies. This is done to ensure equality in media coverage.

Voter Education

Voter education for elections in the Russian Federation is regulated by legislation on elections. State authorities, local self-government bodies, election commissions, media organisations, individuals and legal entities can provide voter information on condition that the disseminated information is objective, reliable, and must not violate the equality of candidates. Bodies of state power and local self-government bodies are prohibited from disseminating information about candidates and political parties.

Criteria for Election of President

The election of the President is done every 6 years on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot (Article 81.1 of the Constitution). Each elected President is expected to lead for a maximum of two 6-year terms. Candidates for the office of the President are expected to be at least 35 years of age and should ordinarily have been resident in the country for not less than 25 years. In addition, candidates must not have foreign citizenship or residence permit in a foreign country, neither at the time of the election nor at any time in the past. Previous legislation expected presidential candidates to belong to a political party, however this requirement was removed by a 2020 Constitutional amendment to allow independent candidates to contest. Party candidates must have a minimum of 100,000 nominators while an independent candidate must have a minimum of 300,000 nominators to be considered by the CEC.

Candidates in the 2024 Presidential Election

Table 1 shows the 2024 presidential candidates.

Table 1: Presidential Candidates in the 2024 Presidential Elections in the Russian Federation

Candidate name	Age	Political Party
Vladislav Davankov	40 years	New People Party
Vladimir Putin	71 years	Independent candidate
Leonid Slutsky	56 years	Liberal Democratic Party
Nikolay Kharitonov	75 years	Communist Party

Electorate in the 2024 Presidential Election

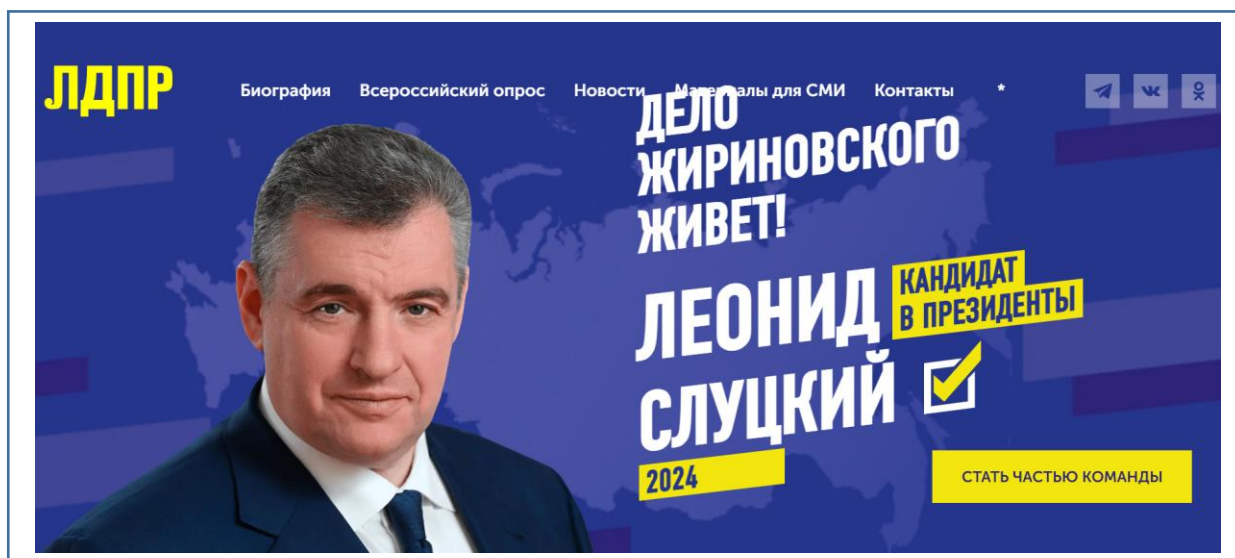
The Federal Law in the Russian Federation requires that citizens must be 18 years and above to register as voters. As of 1 January 2024, the Central Elections Commission had registered 112 309 947 voters living in Russia and 1 890 863 voters living abroad (see picture of electronic display board showing registered voters by region taken at the CEC).



Campaigning

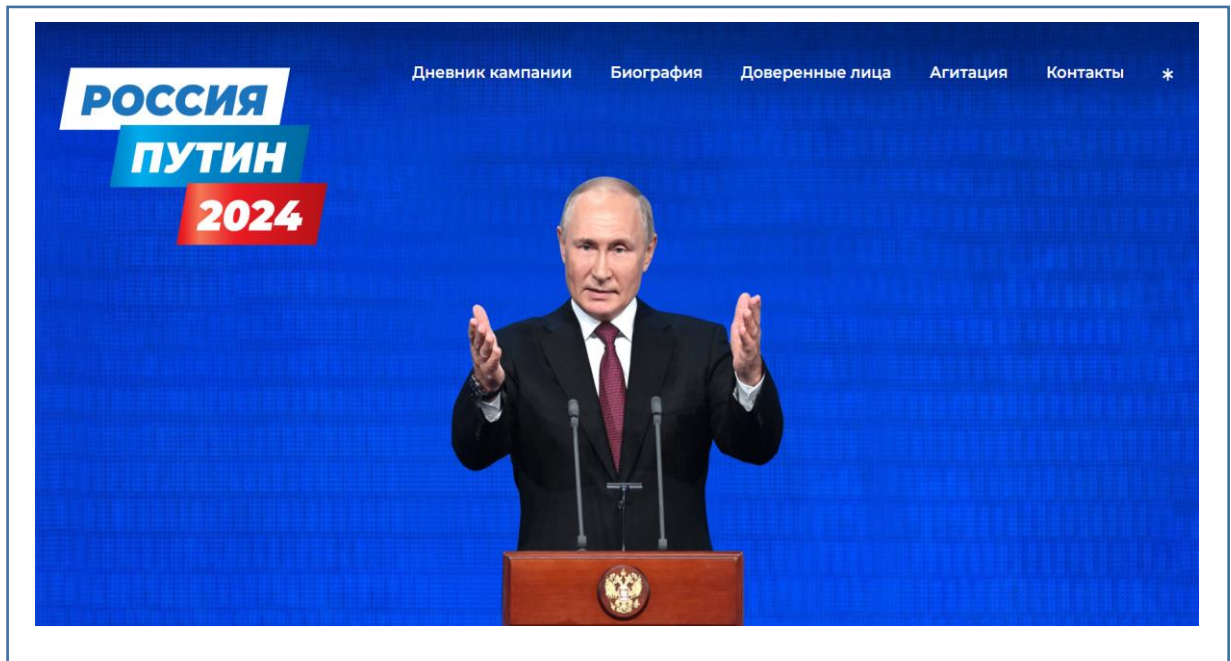
Campaigning officially begins from the day on which a candidate submits to the CEC of the Russian Federation a declaration of consent to run for office and ends at 00:00 local time of the first day of voting. Campaigning on TV channels and radio broadcasting organisations, in printed and in network publications begins 28 days before election day and ends at 00:00 on the first day of voting. Candidates in the 2024 Presidential Elections in the Russian Federation used a number of campaign tools at their disposal, but mainly digital platforms such as Telegram groups and websites. Below are websites of three out of the four candidates in the presidential election (the Mission could not find the campaign website of Nikolay Kharitonov).

1. Campaign website of Leonid Slutsky of the Liberal Democratic Party



<https://xn--2024-94dgh7cva7a.xn--p1ai/>

2. Campaign website of Vladimir Putin, an Independent candidate



<https://putin2024.ru/>

3. Campaign website of Vladislav Davankov of the New People Party



<https://davankov2024.ru/>

Polling

Voting Procedures within a Polling Station

The 2024 Presidential election was held over 3 days from 15 – 17 March 2024. This is a departure from the previous 1-day election. The election relied on existing infrastructure such as schools and libraries for use as polling stations. Most polling stations that the Observer Mission visited had high security with security personnel in the vicinity of the polling station and cameras in the polling stations. Polling stations opened at 8am and closed at 8pm for the 3 days of the election.

While the ballot paper did not have photos of the candidates, every polling station had a poster introducing the candidates. Additionally, every polling station had posters of regulations on the conduct of voters and observers. The posters are a summary of the electoral laws and regulations, and penalties associated with violation of the same.

The mission noted that electronic voting is accessible to all registered voters via a website, accessible through the CEC online portal on laptops and smartphones. After logging in, voters can theoretically cast their ballots on the third day, as long as they remain online. At polling stations, online voting occurs through a digital online booth. The voting process initiates with the electronic scanning of the voter's identification document, followed by selecting their preferred candidate.

Polling stations offer voters the opportunity to exercise their right to vote through conventional ballot methods. In this process, individuals indicate their preferred candidate by marking the ballot paper and subsequently depositing it into the designated ballot box. Additionally, polling stations are furnished with a combination of portable, mobile digitalized electronic devices and ballot boxes, specifically catering to individuals who have applied to cast their votes from their homes or locations outside the designated polling areas. The elderly,

people with disabilities and any voter can apply to vote from home and the CEC is obliged to ensure that they exercise their right. A mobile ballot box will be taken to the home for casting of the ballot paper voting and the same is applicable to digital voting.

Inclusive Participation in Elections

The Central Elections Commission of the Russian Federation developed protocols to allow the participation of everyone who could not physically present themselves at a polling station to exercise their right to vote. These include the following categories of voters:

- Citizens living outside the country;
- Citizens who are away from the place of registration;
- Citizens who want to vote outside the voting premises (voting at home) due to reasons such as disability, illness, need to take care of a person in need, incapacitation; and
- Citizens who reside in hard-to-reach or remote areas.

Measures to protect the right to vote for the above categories included the development of a secure online voting system, setting up of polling stations for hard-to-reach areas days prior to the start of mainstream voting, designation of equipped polling stations for persons with disabilities, and availing the opportunity to apply to vote away from the place of registration.

Voter Turnout

While actual statistics on voter turnout will be announced by CEC in due course, the mission noted that electronic voting appears to be more popular than manual voting. This conclusion was reached on day 3 of voting, after being advised of the voting patterns at each of the polling stations visited. In terms of population demographics, the elderly appeared to prefer manual voting and most of the youths preferred online voting.

Key Observations and Recommendations

Legal Framework

The legal framework of conducting elections in the Russian Federation is sufficient to protect the right to vote and to ensure efficient election management by the election commissions and the Central Election Commission. It is noted that the Constitution of the Russian Federation has a Bill of Rights in Chapter 2 which guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms in the exercise of one's right to vote. Furthermore, the Federal Laws on political parties, media monitoring, and conducting presidential elections give clear guidelines on how to conduct credible elections.

Universal and equal suffrage

The Zimbabwe Election Observation Mission has come to the conclusion that the Presidential Elections in the Russian Federation observed the basic tenets of democratic elections especially observance of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which gives people the power to decide on the leadership of the country through periodic elections that are guided by the principles of universal and equal suffrage.

Media monitoring

The media plays an important role in informing the electorate on electoral processes and activities. The Mission is satisfied with the conduct of the local media in as far as reporting of elections is concerned. Apart from reports by some external media organisations, there is evidence of objective reporting of the activities by the local media that was observed.

Inclusive participation

Madam Chairperson, our Mission is impressed by the steps that the CEC took to ensure that all eligible voters are given an opportunity to exercise their right to vote. The Mission takes note of the extended period of voting

from a day in previous elections to three days in this election. This gives voters an opportunity to exercise their right to vote at their convenience. The Mission also took note of the various options that are available to voters in the Russian Federation such as online voting which attracted youthful voters, voting by citizens in other countries, designated polling stations for persons with disabilities, and designated mobile voting for those in hard-to reach places and those who are incapacitated to present themselves at polling stations.

Voting atmosphere

The general atmosphere was very conducive for elections. The mood was relaxed and cheerful as people were exercising their right to vote. This is a clear sign of a mature democracy in which elections are not perceived as a life and death activity.

Use of existing infrastructure

Honourable Chairperson, we wish to applaud the CEC for the use of schools and other existing infrastructure which we believe significantly reduced the cost of the election but more importantly made it easy to direct voters to the relevant polling stations.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwe Election Observer Mission to the 2024 Presidential Elections of the Russian Federation commends the people of the Russian Federation for exercising their right to vote in a peaceful environment. The Mission also commends the CEC for managing the election in an efficient and professional manner. Therefore, we declare the election free, fair and credible.