

Politics



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Russia Tactical: Voting for presidential elections to be held nationwide on March 15-17; avoid nonessential travel

Current Situation

- On March 15-17, presidential elections will be held nationwide.
- Polling stations will open from 08:00-20:00 (local time). Details on the locations of polling stations can be found [here](#) (in Russian).
- Voting has already been carried out in several remote regions, including Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, in recent days. Further details on the electoral process can be found [here](#) (in Russian).
- Western authorities have raised concerns about the credibility of the upcoming elections due to the heightened state crackdown on domestic opposition figures.
- Meanwhile, the 'Noon Against Putin' protest group has called for non-violent action against the Kremlin at polling stations at 12:00 on March 17. The group has advised those opposing the current government to engage in protest activity by voting against incumbent President Vladimir Putin, invalidating the ballot, or standing at the polling stations without voting.
- Yulia Navalnaya, wife of deceased opposition leader Alexei Navalny, has issued a statement in favor of the group's protest action.

Assessments & Forecast

1. With major opposition figures and activists supporting the call for action by the Noon Against Putin group, polling stations, especially in major cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, are liable to witness passive protests ranging in the low-to-mid dozens during the election days. Despite the organizer claiming that such activities are legal, Russian security officers are expected to resort to the use of forcible crowd dispersal methods, including using batons, tear gas, water cannons, and arbitrary detentions against individuals suspected of engaging in any protest activity.
2. Additionally, Navalny's supporters are likely to call for large-scale anti-government protests during the elections, especially since they continue to blame President Vladimir Putin for Navalny's death. However, authorities are expected to take pre-emptive measures to curb such protests, including carrying out preventive detentions of opposition figures.
3. Moreover, political campaigns, demonstrations, and gatherings by pro-Putin supporters are likely near polling booths. However, authorities are less likely to crack down on such gatherings.
4. With bomb explosions reported at government and electoral offices in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine in recent days, the potential for similar attacks by pro-Ukrainian saboteurs remains elevated in mainland Russia. If such attacks do manifest, they pose a highly credible risk to bystanders.
5. The threat of Islamist terrorism also remains elevated in Russia, with authorities recently accusing [Islamic State \(IS\) militants of planning an attack in Moscow](#). Moreover, the [US Embassy issued a warning](#) on March 8 about "extremists" planning attacks on large public gatherings, which is liable to raise concerns about safety at polling booths. Given this, security is expected to be heightened near polling stations to prevent any such security incidents, as well as to deter potential protests.
6. Disruptions to vehicular and pedestrian traffic are expected nationwide. Road traffic and public transport systems are expected to face congestion over the weekend with people moving to their registered districts to vote. Security cordons and preemptive road closures or diversions are likely to be set up, especially in Moscow, St Petersburg, and other major cities.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Russia on March 15-17 are advised to avoid nonessential travel near planned and spontaneous protests denouncing the presidential elections.
2. Maintain heightened vigilance near polling stations. Leave the area in case of protest activity.
3. Comply with orders given by authorities and security personnel.
4. For contingency in the event of an escalation in tensions, always carry a copy of your passport, current prescriptions, and a sufficient amount of cash.
5. Be mindful of social media activity due to online posts being used in cases against alleged dissent.
6. Continue to remain abreast of updates and advisories from Russian authorities.
7. For more information on the security situation and assistance please contact intel@max-security.com.