

# Churov: Putin Can Lose Elections

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The fact that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will run for president does not mean that the March 2012 election is a done deal, Central Elections Commission chief Vladimir Churov said Monday.

Asked at a news conference whether he thought that the result of the vote was a forgone conclusion after President Dmitry Medvedev proposed Putin's candidature last weekend, Churov said he disagreed with the question.

"You did not ask a question, you made a dogmatic statement. To tell you straight away, I disagree," he said, Interfax reported.

Putin and his chosen successor, Medvedev, did not face any serious rivals in the last two presidential elections. Putin won the 2004 vote with a clear 71 percent, while Medvedev took 70 percent in 2008.

Analysts do not expect the situation to change much this time. Although Putin's ratings have fallen recently, he remains by far the country's most popular politician with just over 50 percent approval ratings.

The decision to present Putin's bid at the convention of United Russia, the ruling party chaired by him, might partly be explained by opinion polls, said Alexander Oslon, the director of the Public Opinion Foundation, a polling agency that regularly compiles data for the Kremlin.

"Polls are one of many factors," Oslon said on Russian News Service radio.

United Russia's support is at 41 percent, according to a poll released by the pollster earlier this month. The party has a two-thirds majority in the State Duma after receiving about 64 percent of the vote in 2007.

Churov, whose commission has in the past regularly refused registration to candidates from the nonparliamentary opposition, also conceded that the media play an important role in preventing abuse of power in favor of United Russia.

"Our combined attention will ensure that we won't miss a thing," he said.

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