

# Putin Says No Rerun of Duma Elections

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Prime Minister and presidential candidate Vladimir Putin said Thursday that he does not plan to run State Duma elections early, as the opposition has demanded, if he is elected president on Sunday, RIA-Novosti reported.

Cancelling the results of December's parliamentary vote is one of the central demands of the invigorated opposition movement, which claims mass fraud was committed in favor of the ruling United Russia party. Street protests held in recent months under the slogan "For Fair Elections" have been fueled by popular discontent with the December vote results.

Answering a question at a meeting with chief editors of international newspapers, Putin said the next Duma elections will be held "at the time stipulated by current legislation." The next Duma vote is set to take place in 2016.

President Dmitry Medvedev has also dismissed opposition appeals to rerun the elections, instead insisting that all alleged violations be investigated by law enforcement officials.

While Putin did not budge on that demand by the protest movement, he spoke approvingly of the demonstrations, saying they provided a positive stimulus to the government.

"I, for instance, am very glad that this kind of situation has arisen, because it means that organs of authority...must respond promptly to what is happening in the country, to people's moods, and to meet their expectations. That is, this situation that has come about makes organs of authority more viable, creates the need to think, to look for solutions and to communicate with society," he said, RIA-Novosti reported.

"I believe this is a very positive experience for Russia," he said.

But Putin disputed the notion that the demonstrations, which have been concentrated in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other large cities, show that his support is low among urban populations.

"You said that urban residents are against [me]," he said, referring to a comment made by one of the journalists. "They are not against [me]. The number of people who support me [there] is lower. That's true. But it is nonetheless a majority."

At least one recent public opinion survey lends credence to Putin's view. In a survey conducted Feb. 25 and 26 by the Public Opinion Fund, 54 percent of participants in cities with over 1 million people said they would vote for Putin in the upcoming election, which was actually slightly more than his 51 percent support in the country at large. But in Moscow, only 45 percent of those polled were for Putin.

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