

Most Russians Support Intergration of Crimea, Poll Shows

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An overwhelming majority of Russians support the inclusion of Crimea as part of Russia, a new survey from pollster VTsIOM has shown.

Conducted just ahead of the Crimea referendum on March 16, the poll found that 93 percent of those questioned supported Russia's annexation of the breakaway Ukrainian region.

When asked what position Russia should take in case of a conflict with Ukrainian authorities over Crimea, 80 percent of respondents said Russia should "fight to the end" for the right to control the region, up from 67 percent a week before. Ten percent said that Russia should not continue to fight for the region if it led to open confrontation with Ukraine or the West, down from 19 percent after the first week of March.

The most popular reason for considering Crimea to be a part of Russia — backed by 65 percent of respondents — was that the peninsula was "historically our territory," until Nikita Khrushchev gifted the region to Ukraine in 1954. The second most popular reason for annexation, backed by 22 percent of respondents, was that ethnic Russians comprise

a majority of the region's population.

News of Russians' annexation approval follows data about the approval rating of President Vladimir Putin, whose level of support among voters jumped to a five-year high in a poll conducted over the same time period as the Crimea survey.

Between March 8 and March 15, Putin's approval rating grew four percentage points to 75.7 percent, continuing a rise from 60.6 percent in the middle of January.

Both polls, carried out among 1,600 people in 130 villages across 42 Russian regions, had a statistical margin of error no greater than 3.4 percent.

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