

Putin Announces 2018 Presidential Bid, Surprising No One

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Vladimir Putin / Mikhail Metzel / TASS

Vladimir Putin on Wednesday announced he is running for the Russian presidency in upcoming elections, seeking a fourth term next year that would extend his rule to 2024.

Putin, who has dominated politics since first becoming president in 2000, is practically guaranteed to win. A September poll by the independent Levada Center [put](#) his approval ratings at 83 percent.

Next year's elections on March 18 are timed to coincide with the anniversary of Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine — an event which largely consolidated Putin's popularity at home.

"I will put forward my candidacy for the position of president of the Russian Federation," the Interfax news agency [cited](#) Putin as saying during an event in honor of the 85th anniversary of the Gorky car factory GAZ, in Nizhny Novgorod.

"There's probably no better occasion or place to make this announcement."

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Earlier on Wednesday, Putin was asked by a presenter at an event in Moscow celebrating volunteer work whether he would seek re-election in March.

"My question to you is: If I take such a decision then will you and people like you support this decision?" the Russian leader replied.

The audience then erupted in cheers to which Putin said: "This decision will be taken soon and when I make it, I'll keep in mind this conversation and your response."

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The announcement came as many Russians were trying to come to terms with an International Olympic Committee ruling banning Russia from the upcoming Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, over allegations of a state-sponsored doping program. Putin has [dismissed](#) the accusations of doping as a U.S. attempt to interfere in Russian elections.

"In response to our supposed interference in their elections, they want to cause problems in the Russian presidential election," he said.

Putin will face little opposition in the upcoming vote. Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov — who has yet to confirm his candidacy — and Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy have contested and lost several presidential elections.

Meanwhile, opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been barred from running because of a prior conviction for embezzlement, which his supporters say is politically motivated.

The only notable newcomer to the electoral race so far has been former reality television star and opposition journalist [Ksenia Sobchak](#), who has been dismissed by pundits as a "spoiler candidate," whose candidacy is meant to split the opposition vote.

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