

Orthodox Patriarch Urges Russians to Vote in Presidential Elections

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Patriarch Kirill (Sergei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency)

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox church, has called on believers to vote in the coming presidential elections in March, in which President Vladimir Putin is expected to secure another term.

The religious leader has [been](#) Putin's ally since the Russian leader's return to the presidency in 2012. Kremlin officials are [hoping](#) for Putin to win 70 percent of the vote amid a 70-percent turnout in the upcoming elections on March 18, amidst fears that a low voter turnout may weaken his mandate.

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In an interview published on Jan. 7, the day the Russian Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas, Patriarch Kirill told the state-run television station Rossia 1 that voting was

“intrinsic” to the church.

“That’s why I would call on everyone, including Orthodox people, to definitely participate in the upcoming presidential elections. It’s very important,” he [said](#).

The patriarch issued a similar call to vote on Dec. 26, a day after election officials barred opposition leader Alexei Navalny from registering as a candidate.

Despite polls showing that most Russians [seek](#) to preserve a separation between church and state, the Russian Orthodox Church has strongly [supported](#) Putin's return to traditionalism and conservative values since the beginning of his third term in 2012.

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