

# What to Expect From Putin's Federal Assembly Address

The speech will hint at Putin's political program for his fourth term in office

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On Thursday, President Vladimir Putin will give his annual state of the nation address to the Federal Assembly.

Traditionally held in December, the address to members of both houses of parliament usually serves as a roadmap for policymakers and the Russian elite on what to expect in the year ahead.

This year's address however is different, analysts say. For the first time in a decade, the speech was delayed, with the new March 1 date [announced](#) by Putin's campaign manager, rather than his spokesperson Dmitry Peskov.

It was also moved from the Kremlin, where it is usually held, to Moscow's Manege building — a large exhibition space in the city center — which Peskov said will be outfitted with a large screen to display infographics.

After announcing he would run in presidential elections scheduled for March 18, Putin embarked on a bare-bones campaign in December.

“He hasn't taken part in any debates, he hasn't explained his political program, he hasn't used any of his allotted time on television,” political scientist Yekaterina Schulmann told The Moscow Times.

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With less than a month to go until the vote, Putin is expected to use the address to shed light on the fourth term he is slated to win in March.

Here is what voters and policymakers can expect to hear:

## **Poverty**

During Putin's fourth term, Russia's economy will be high on the agenda, political analysts say.

“This is people's main worry right now,” explained Andrei Kolesnikov of the Carnegie Moscow Center.

According to Russia's state statistics agency Rosstat, real incomes have fallen across Russia and 19.6 million people live below the poverty line — 4.2 million more than in 2012.

“Voters will want to hear something about raising salaries, lowering rent and utility tariffs, as well as implementing state control over prices,” said political analyst Abbas Gallyamov. “Putin will have to address this in some form.”

## **Social reforms**

With Russians across the country having to tighten their belts, Putin could announce a spending spree on education, infrastructure and health care, the business daily Vedomosti [reports](#).

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Health care in particular is a key worry for Russians, said Schulmann, especially after a significant number of hospitals have [closed](#) in recent years and many others went private. “People see a future of lower quality of services and having to pay for what was previously free,” she said.

Putin will likely point to the \$8.6 billion he [offered](#) families late last year as evidence of his concern for social issues and his ability to find solutions to them.

## Business climate

Russia's business community will be hoping to hear what specific steps can be taken to help the economy recover from recession, political analysts say.

Earlier this month, at a meeting with the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Putin [said](#) he would discuss the problem in detail in his address.

"We will continue to improve the business climate in Russia, create comfortable conditions for investment in new industries, create high-quality jobs, get rid of barriers in regulations and develop infrastructure," the president said.

He also [suggested](#) that he will discuss investing in science and combating the country's ongoing brain drain.

## Foreign policy

Restoring Russia's image as a global power has been one of the mainstays of Putin's rule. In his third term, Russia annexed Crimea, became a powerbroker in the Middle East by entering the war in Syria and sowed confusion in the West by allegedly interfering in elections.

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But analysts say it is risky for Putin to lean too heavily on his foreign policy successes with voters who are increasingly concerned with stagnation at home.

"Foreign policy is a source of anxiety," Schulmann said. "People feel that we are doing great on the world stage. But at the same time there is a growing feeling of discontent at the money and effort spent abroad that is needed inside the country."

Still, some analysts expect Putin to touch on topics like Syria and U.S.-Russia relations, even if they won't make up the lion's share of his speech.

"He will discuss foreign policy regardless of how beneficial it is to him from the point of view of domestic policy," said Gallyamov. "For him, it is the whole point of the presidency."

Whatever Putin announces on Thursday, though, analysts said victory in the election is certain.

"Putin has a 70 percent approval rating," said political analyst Yevgeny Minchenko. "Why does he need to make any big announcements?"

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*\*The speech will be shown by state-run television channels starting at noon on Thursday.*

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