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70 percent of Russians Say Crimea Annexation Was Good for the Country

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On the eve of the presidential elections, a growing number of Russians see the annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine as beneficial, according to a new poll published by the independent Levada Center.

Russia's elections on Sunday will coincide with the fourth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, which President Vladimir Putin visited on Wednesday. In the past three years, Levada has tracked a gradual uptick in the percentage of Russians who believe that their country gained from "the return of Crimea."

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Seventy percent of those surveyed by Levada say that Crimea's annexation was beneficial for Russia, according to its latest poll published on Thursday, returning to a peak last seen in March 2015. Overall support for the annexation has held steady at 86 percent, Levada said.

Fifteen percent said the annexation of the peninsula hurt Russia, while another 15 percent were unable to provide an answer.

Levada Center sociologist Natalya Zorkaya attributed the high numbers to Putin's saber-rattling speech on March 1, she told the Vedomosti business daily.

"People understand that the roots of this conflict originated in Crimea and the situation in Ukraine. The 'Russia versus the whole world' ideological component still plays a role," Zorkaya told Vedomosti.

The sociologist noted that "more educated people with a high consumer status" opposed the annexation of Crimea in the latest Levada survey.

Some 1,600 Russians were polled across 137 towns and cities in 48 Russian regions.

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