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Russia Plans July 1 Vote on Putin's Constitutional Amendments After Coronavirus Delay

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Putin in January unleashed a political storm by proposing an overhaul of the Constitution, the first changes to the basic law since 1993. **Kremlin.ru**

Russia's public vote on a set of constitutional amendments that would allow President Vladimir Putin to stay in power through 2036 will take place on July 1, Putin said at a meeting with officials.

"Indeed, July 1 looks like quite a suitable date to hold the Russian vote on the constitutional amendments," Putin said during a video conference with members of the constitutional amendments working group after Central Election Committee Head Ella Pamfilova proposed the date.

The vote was originally set for April 22 but pushed back due to the coronavirus.

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Pamfilova added a proposal to allow early voting starting June 25, citing the need to avoid crowds due to the potential spread of the coronavirus. She offered expanding polling stations to include outdoor locations, mobile voting stations and online voting in certain regions.

"The longer the vote is delayed, the more the groundwork that was made will be blurred," Pamfilova said.

Anna Popova, the head of Russia's consumer protection watchdog Rospotrebnadzor, said during the meeting that holding the vote on July 1 would be safe for the public.

Putin in January unleashed a political storm by proposing an overhaul of the Constitution, the first changes to the basic law since 1993.

Since then, he has seen his popularity fall to historic lows, with public discontent brewing over his handling of the economic fallout from the coronavirus.

Early voting on June 25 will start one day after the annual massive military parade in Moscow and across Russian cities, which Putin postponed from its original date of May 9 as coronavirus cases peaked early last month.

Observers have noted that the Kremlin designed the steps, including picking a date close to the Victory Day parade and expanding voting options, to ensure high turnout. State-run and independent polls have shown a majority or close to a majority of Russians expressing willingness to vote in favor of the amendments, which in addition to resetting presidential term limits enshrine social guarantees.

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