

Support for Russia's Ruling Party Drops to Pre-Crimea Low – Poll

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The pro-Kremlin United Russia party's ratings are lagging ahead of key legislative elections. **Yuri Smityuk / TASS**

Support for Russia's pro-Kremlin ruling party has dropped to an eight-year low ahead of legislative elections where it seeks to retain a supermajority this fall, independent poll results [said](#) Thursday.

United Russia, which enjoys a two-thirds majority in the country's lower house of parliament, would receive 27% of the vote if it was held this Sunday, according to the Levada Center polling agency.

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The only time United Russia's support [dipped](#) below that figure was in June 2013, months before patriotic fervor swept the country with the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. It has since jumped to almost 40% in 2017 before plateauing at around 30% in recent years.

United Russia's support also dropped among likely Russian voters, though its 42% rating was still at least double those of its closest competitors.

The results represent a predictable lull before the start of campaigning for the Sept. 19 State Duma elections and will likely bounce back in June, according to party expert Konstantin Kostin.

“As long as the campaign hasn't started, the candidates aren't actively working and the party's program hasn't been announced, this is what United Russia's rating should be,” he [told](#) the Znak.com news website.

The party's strength is likely to be tested by jailed Putin foe Alexei Navalny's “Smart Voting” tactic of campaigning for the single most viable United Russia challenger. Navalny adopted the tactic after electoral authorities barred him from challenging Putin in the 2018 presidential election and members of his team from the 2019 regional vote.

Navalny's chief of staff Leonid Volkov says the group still plans to field 10 State Duma candidates this fall and back another 1,600 through “Smart Voting.”

Constitutional changes that a majority of Russians voted in favor last summer gave Putin, 68, the chance to extend his 21-year rule by another 12 years.

Levada conducted the survey among 1,601 respondents across 50 Russian regions between Feb. 18-24.

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