

Russian Passport Holders in East Ukraine May Vote in Duma Elections – Deputy

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President Vladimir Putin simplified the path to Russian citizenship for residents of Ukraine's breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in 2019. **Dave Mustaine / EPA / TASS**

Russian passport holders from separatist-held eastern Ukraine could be allowed to vote in this September's legislative elections, a lawmaker [told](#) Interfax on Tuesday.

"They are citizens of the Russian Federation who have gained all the rights and, accordingly, [can] participate in elections. That's why Russia is obliged to give them the opportunity to express their will," Leonid Kalashnikov, who heads the State Duma's CIS Affairs and Relations With Russian Nationals Abroad Committee, told Interfax.

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President Vladimir Putin [simplified](#) the path to Russian citizenship for residents of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2019, citing humanitarian concerns for residents of areas where pro-Russian separatists are locked in a bitter war against Ukrainian forces.

More than 240,000 residents of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic have since obtained Russian citizenship, according to the latest figures [cited](#) by the area's de-facto leader Denis Pushilin. Russian State Duma Deputy Andrei Kozenko, however, [put](#) the number at 400,000 back in January.

Russia's Central Electoral Commission has not yet determined how voting for Ukraine-based citizens will be organized. Voters may be transported to polling stations in Russia's neighboring Rostov region to cast their votes, Kalashnikov noted.

However, according to Donetsk's de-facto leader, residents are hoping for a "more convenient" voting arrangement.

"Citizens of Russia living in the Donetsk and Luhansk republics hope that there will be polling stations here," Pushilin [told](#) Parlamentskaya Gazeta on Tuesday. "It won't be an exaggeration to say that we are honored to exercise our constitutional right and participate in the Duma elections."

The ruling, pro-Kremlin United Russia party, which seeks to maintain its State Duma majority in the September vote, has been shoring up support amid [record low](#) approval ratings and challenges from opposition figure Alexei Navalny's "Smart Voting" strategy.

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