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Russian Deputies Back Law to Prolong Putin's Rule

By AFP

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Russian voters overwhelmingly approved constitutional reforms last year. **Kremlin.ru**

Russian lawmakers on Wednesday approved legislation allowing President Vladimir Putin to hold office for two additional terms, paving the way for him to stay in power until 2036.

Putin, already in power for more than 20 years, proposed the change as part of constitutional reforms that Russians overwhelmingly backed in a vote last year.

They included populist economic measures and enshrined conservative values long touted by the Kremlin with a clause mentioning the country's "faith in God" and another effectively banning gay marriage.

The bill approved by lawmakers Wednesday allows Putin to contest presidential elections again after his current mandate expires in 2024.

The upper house of parliament is set to consider the legislation later this month and it is

expected to be signed into law later by Putin.

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Kremlin opponents criticized the initiative last year, calling it a pretext to allow Putin to become "president for life."

He came to power as president in 2000 and served two consecutive four-year mandates, giving way to ally Dmitry Medvedev for one term before returning to the Kremlin in 2012.

The referendum last year, which was held over one week in June-July in a move authorities said was aimed at limiting the risk of voters spreading or catching coronavirus, saw nearly 78% cast their votes in favor of the reforms.

Golos, an independent election monitor, said it received hundreds of complaints of violations, including people voting more than once and claims employers were putting pressure on staff to cast ballots.

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