

Russia Staggers Parliamentary Elections to Limit Covid Spread

By [AFP](#)

June 18, 2021



Ella Pamfilova at the poll center press conference, July 2, 2020 **MSK Agency**

Russia's parliamentary elections in September will be held over three days to limit the spread of coronavirus, the head of the poll body said Friday, as new cases hit a record in Moscow.

Voting will be staggered from Sept. 17 to Sept. 19, Ella Pamfilova told a commission meeting.

"Three days will guarantee sanitary and epidemiological safety for the health of our citizens," Pamfilova was cited by Russian news agencies as saying.

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Moscow on Friday reported a pandemic daily high for new infections at just over 9,000, with the city's mayor blaming the surge on the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India.

Russia is one of the countries hardest hit by Covid-19 with the sixth-highest number of infections worldwide, according to an AFP tally.

Local and regional elections in September last year were held over three days, while several months earlier a week-long constitutional referendum paved the way for President Vladimir Putin to remain in power until 2036.

Golos, an independent election monitor, said it received hundreds of complaints of violations during the referendum, including multiple voting and intimidation.

The opposition claimed that voting over several days gives election officials greater opportunities to fix elections.

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The lead-up to September's parliamentary elections has seen the authorities pile pressure on the opposition, declaring the organizations of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny extremist and barring his allies from legislative polls.

Critics point to sagging ratings for Putin's United Russia party, which is becoming increasingly unpopular amid economic stagnation.

A survey published by the state-run pollster VTsIOM on Friday showed that 30% of voters support United Russia compared with an approval rating of 61.5% for Putin himself.

Despite the clampdown on the opposition, Navalny's allies are promoting his Smart Voting strategy that backs candidates best placed to defeat Kremlin-linked politicians.

The tactic has seen United Russia lose a number of seats in recent local elections.

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