

Breakaway Ukrainian Region to Bus Russian Passport Holders to the Polls

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A sign promoting the 2021 Russian State Duma election is seen on a street in Donetsk. The message reads: "We Choose Russia." **Nikolai Trishin / TASS**

Authorities in eastern Ukraine's breakaway Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) have readied nearly 1,000 buses and trains to neighboring Russia for residents to cast ballots in this weekend's parliamentary elections, a move slammed by officials in Kiev.

An estimated 600,000 Russian passport holders from the DPR and the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), separatist-held regions that have been at war with Ukraine since 2014, are eligible to vote in the Sept. 17-19 poll.

The European Union this year reportedly [claimed](#) that Russia aims to "de facto integrate" the areas known as Donbass into Russia by issuing Russian passports and organizing local elections there, an assertion the Kremlin rejected.

Russian passport holders in the DNR will be able to travel to the Rostov region aboard 825 specially organized buses and 12 trains for the State Duma vote this Sunday, Interfax [quoted](#)

DPR leader Denis Pushilin as saying.

He added that authorities will ease border control rules for the voting period, according to Interfax.

The LNR has not yet indicated whether similar busing arrangements into Russia's Rostov region would be made available for its residents.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told journalists Moscow was in "violation of international law" by organising the vote in the eastern regions and Crimea.

"The only status that the Russian Federation has is as an occupying state," Kuleba said, adding that Moscow would "one day have to pay."

In addition to in-person voting, Russian passport holders from the Donbass will also be able to cast their ballots online through the Russian government's public services portal. The Rostov region is one of seven Russian subjects where Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) is trialing electronic voting, in part due to the number of Donbass passport holders who are not registered at a permanent place of residence within Russia.

Donbass voters last summer [participated](#) in Russia's vote to revise its Constitution — which granted President Vladimir Putin the authority to extend his rule into 2036 — when they were similarly bused into the Rostov region.

Despite its low approval ratings, the ruling pro-Putin United Russia party is expected to secure a majority of the votes that would allow it to enact legislation for the next five years.

AFP contributed reporting.

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