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Russian Elections Chief Says 3-Day Voting Here To Stay

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Central Election Commission chair Elena Pamfilova. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's three-day voting periods are likely here to stay, the head of the country's Central Election Commission (CEC) said Friday, a move that critics warn will make it easier to commit voter fraud.

Ella Pamfilova's comments came as Russia kicked off a parliamentary election with both in-person and online voting from Sept. 17-19. This weekend's elections are seen as a crucial test of the ruling, pro-Kremlin United Russia party's grip on power.

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"Given that ... in all the opinion polls, everyone who took part gave a very positive review of the three-day voting, it will most likely catch on," Pamfilova said.

Officials said they spread the typically single-day vote over a three-day period to prevent

Covid-19 transmissions.

Russians previously took part in a three-day vote in last summer's plebiscite to approve amendments to the Constitution. The changes, which were approved by a large majority of voters despite reports of widespread voter fraud, enshrined socially conservative values into the Constitution and allowed President Vladimir Putin to potentially extend his rule by another 12 years.

Russian lawmakers are looking to pass draft legislation that would prolong elections for up to three days and allow election authorities to hold voting outside normal polling stations.

The independent Golos election monitor has launched a petition against three-day voting, claiming that it "opens up wide opportunities for fraud" and also creates "obvious difficulties for the work of election commissions, schools and other public institutions involved in the electoral process."

Critics also warn that electronic voting opens up even more chances to falsify votes.

Video footage appearing to show ballot stuffing and other fraudulent tactics has started circulating on social media as Russians take to the polls.

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