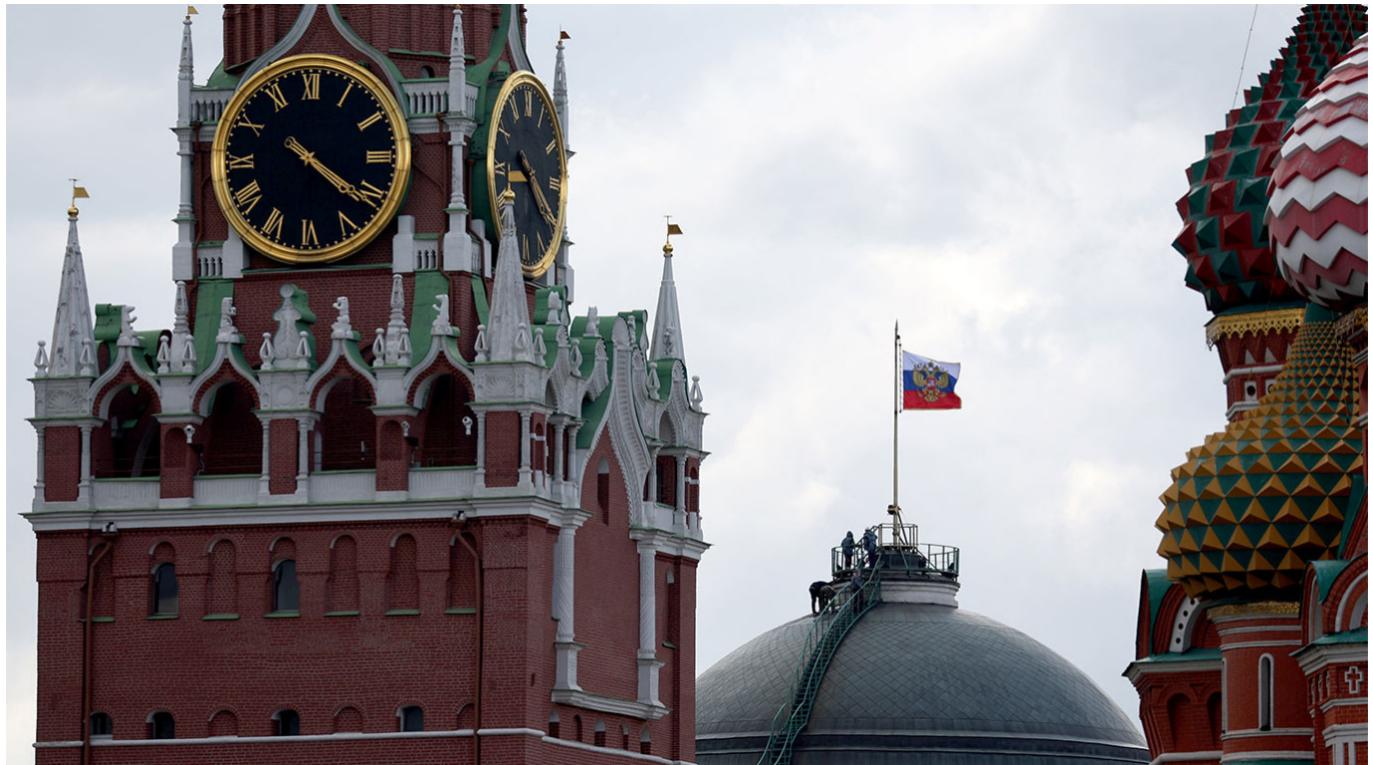


Russia Sets Presidential Election for March 17

By [AFP](#)

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Sergei Bobylev / TASS

Russia on Thursday set March 17 as the date for a presidential election which is expected to be another shoo-in for Vladimir Putin, who has silenced opposition during over two decades in power.

In a meeting broadcast live on Russian television, the upper house of parliament unanimously approved the date of the vote.

The decision "practically kicks off the presidential campaign," according to the head of the chamber, Valentina Matviyenko.

Putin, a former KGB agent who has been in power in Russia either as president or prime minister since 1999, has not officially announced if he will stand in the vote for another six-year mandate.

The 71-year-old is due to hold an end-of-year press conference next week, where he could announce his candidacy.

It will be the first time he holds such a press conference since he ordered Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

Related article: [As Putin's Re-Election Looms, Kremlin Pushes to Indoctrinate a New Generation of Voters](#)

Russia has since said it has annexed the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia even though Russian troops do not fully control them.

Voting is planned also in those regions.

"Despite the difficult external circumstances and the attempts by the enemy to weaken Russia, we remain true to our main constitutional values," Matviyenko said.

'United like never before'

She added that Russians were "united like never before" around Putin's government "and the task of the state is to show it is worthy of this trust and to prevent any provocations."

Putin would be running for a fifth presidential term. Following a constitutional reform in 2020, he could stay in power as president until 2036.

Since launching the campaign in Ukraine, Putin has become a pariah among Western leaders and his country has been hit by unprecedented sanctions.

But the Kremlin chief has become increasingly confident in recent weeks as Western support for Ukraine has frayed and Ukraine's counter-offensive has largely failed to pierce Russian lines.

The Russian economy has also proved resilient against sanctions and is growing again as Russia re-orientates its energy exports to Asian clients.

After his first two presidential terms, Putin briefly became prime minister between 2008 and 2012 while his protege Dmitry Medvedev became president.

The switch was to get around a constitutional ban on more than two consecutive presidential terms.

During his long rule, Putin has silenced dissent and turned Russia towards authoritarianism and nationalism.

Almost all opposition figures have either been imprisoned, are in exile or have been killed in murky circumstances.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Russia has imprisoned opponents of the war with beefed-up legislation outlawing criticism of the army.

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