# Russian Communists Pit Political Veteran Against Putin

By [AFP](#)

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Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov (R) and State Duma member Nikolai Kharitonov attend a party congress, Dec. 23. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

The Communist Party of Russia, the second-largest party in parliament, on Saturday selected a 75-year-old to stand next March in presidential polls against Vladimir Putin.

At a party congress in the Moscow region, the members held a single-candidate vote backing Nikolai Kharitonov.

He won just under 14% of the national vote when he stood against Putin in 2004.

"Kharitonov's candidacy was supported by an overwhelming majority of congress participants in a secret ballot," said fellow Communist Alexander Yushchenko, quoted by Interfax news agency.

The ballot paper had a single name on it: Kharitonov's.

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The Communist Party of Russia, led since 1993 by Gennady Zyuganov, fielded an alternative candidate in the 2018 presidential polls.

On paper the Communist Party is in opposition, but in practice it backs up Putin's party, United Russia.

If victorious in next March's polls, Putin could stay in power until 2030.

A fan of martial arts, Kharitonov worked as a collective farm manager in Siberia in the Soviet era.

He later became a member of the Agrarian Party, an offshoot of the Communists.

This week at a party conference, Kharitonov praised the Soviet forced collectivization of agriculture as a "correct reform that allowed us to resolve the food problem on the eve of a great war."

He said Saturday that "our task is to consolidate the people during the election campaign so that there is victory, victory on all fronts."

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