

Russia and Ukraine Down Drones as Voting Starts

By [AFP](#)

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A Russian serviceman stands by a ballot box in the occupied Ukrainian city of Sievierodonetsk.

Alexander Reka / TASS

Russia and Ukraine downed drones and rockets overnight as polling stations opened across Russia on the first day of voting in the country's presidential election.

Kyiv has launched some of its largest air attacks on Russia this week ahead of the vote, which is set to hand President Vladimir Putin another six-year term in the Kremlin.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Friday it had downed drones and rockets over the Belgorod border region and the Kaluga region, southwest of the capital Moscow.

"Air defense equipment intercepted and destroyed five drones and two rockets over the territories of the Belgorod and Kaluga regions," it said in a statement on Telegram.

In a later statement it said another seven Ukrainian-launched rockets had been shot down

over Belgorod at 8:15 a.m. (0515 GMT) — shortly after voting got underway in the region.

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The state-run RIA Novosti news agency said voters left a polling station in Belgorod city to head to a bomb shelter as authorities issued an air alert and ordered people to take cover.

The governor of Russia's Lipetsk region also said Friday two drones were downed in a district around 300 kilometers away from Ukraine.

Ukraine's air force said Russia fired 27 Iranian-designed drones and eight missiles at its territory overnight.

In a statement on social media, it said that "27 out of 27 Shahed [drones] were destroyed."

Polling stations were opening across Russia's 11 time zones on Friday, as Putin called on voters to back his leadership despite a "difficult period" for the country.

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