The Moscow Times
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Russian Election, Cast as Test of Support for Ukraine War, Enters Final Day

By Andrew Osborn for Reuters

September 20, 2026

A woman casts her ballot for Russia's parliamentary election at a polling station in Klimovsk in the Moscow region, on September 19, 2026. **Igor Ivanko/AFP**

A parliamentary election that President Vladimir Putin has cast as a test of support for Russia's war in Ukraine entered its third and final day on Sunday, with the ruling United Russia party expected to retain its dominance in a political system critics say does not tolerate dissent.

The State Duma vote, the first since Russia launched its full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, is likely to be presented by the Kremlin as evidence of public backing for Putin's policies and for the war, Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, now in its fifth year with no sign of ending soon.

Most anti-war candidates were barred from the ballot. Those who did run from the liberal Yabloko party, which has polled in the single digits in recent years but hoped to tap into war

fatigue, said they feared for their freedom after courts handed long jail terms to two senior party figures before the vote for comments about the conflict deemed illegal by authorities.

Discrediting the army or spreading what authorities regard as fake news are punishable by lengthy prison sentences.

The Kremlin says national unity and some censorship are necessary during what it calls its “special military operation” in Ukraine. It casts the conflict as part of an existential struggle with a hostile West and says Ukrainian intelligence services and other enemies are stepping up efforts to stir unrest inside Russia.

Putin on Friday accused Ukraine of trying to interfere in the election, citing what he said was a Ukrainian strike on the home of an election official in the Russian-controlled part of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region that killed Yelena Astanina, the official. Reuters could not independently verify details of the attack and there was no immediate comment from Kyiv.

Russian electoral officials also said on Saturday that an online voting system in Moscow had come under cyberattack. Kyiv, which has suspended elections under martial law, has dismissed the Russian vote as a "pseudo election."

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Despite what most experts see as the election's predictable outcome, the NEST think-tank in Berlin, co-founded by Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky, whom Russian authorities have designated "a foreign agent", said the vote could still produce awkward moments for the Kremlin at a time of economic strain.

"The consequences of the war are increasingly being felt within the country, and accumulated anxiety and frustration may translate into votes for the systemic opposition parties that the Kremlin has allowed to remain on the ballot," it said in a note.

It said the Communist party and the New People party could attract votes the authorities would prefer to go to United Russia. Both parties have consistently voted in line with United Russia on major issues.

Putin told the nation in a televised address before the election that the vote would underline support for Russian troops fighting in Ukraine.

"Your choice, and your will, will once again demonstrate that millions of people stand behind our soldiers, that we are a united people bound together by shared values, historical memory, and love for our homeland, and that no one will succeed in dividing or intimidating us," said Putin.

Initial results are expected to start emerging at around 18:00 GMT on Sunday, with more complete results available on Monday.

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