

Putin Is Unlikely to Run for Kremlin, United Russia Adviser Says

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Vladimir Putin is unlikely to run in next year's presidential election, a United Russia adviser said.

"Putin is strengthening his right to rule without a formal status as president or prime minister so he can dodge problems as a leader of a popular front and simply as a leader of the nation," Mikhail Vinogradov, head of the Petersburg Politics Foundation, said Monday.

President Dmitry Medvedev, handpicked by Putin to succeed him four years ago, will probably seek a second term, the research group said.

In May, Putin formed the All-Russia People's Front, a nationwide coalition of supporters, as backing for United Russia dwindled. The party's popularity has slipped to about 40 percent after it won almost two-thirds of the vote four years ago.

Putin, who has remained at the center of power since relinquishing the presidency, leads Medvedev in opinion polls. He stepped down in 2008 after serving the maximum two

consecutive terms permitted by the Constitution.

The presidential election will take place in March.

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