

# Support for Putin Among Russian Voters Doubles

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Support for Putin has skyrocketed since Russia's annexation of Crimea last March.

More than half of Russians would vote for President Vladimir Putin if a snap presidential election were held, a survey published Thursday showed.

Fifty-five percent of the 1,600 adults across Russia polled about their voting intentions by the independent Levada Center last month said they would cast their ballot in favor of Putin if a snap presidential election were held the following weekend. Of those people who said they would definitely turn out to vote and who had already made up their minds who to vote for, 86 percent would choose Putin, according to the poll, which had a margin of error not exceeding 3.4 percent.

Support for Putin has skyrocketed since Russia's annexation of Crimea last March. In January 2014, 29 percent of Russian voters said they would vote for Putin in a snap election. In April, after Crimea had joined Russia's federal fold, 49 percent of Russians were ready to cast their

ballots in his favor.

Putin's approval rating currently stands at 86 percent, according to the Levada Center. The president's approval rating hit a historic high of 88 percent in October, amid intense fighting between pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian military forces in eastern Ukraine.

The latest Levada Center poll also revealed that 57 percent of Russians would like to see Putin re-elected in the 2018 presidential election. One-quarter of the population would like to see another candidate assume the presidency, according to the poll.

The patriotic fervor that has inundated Russia since its annexation of Crimea has prompted the proliferation of Putin merchandise in the country's souvenir stores. A survey published Thursday by the Levada Center found that despite their support for their president, Russians are not in a hurry to purchase Putin paraphernalia. Seventy-two percent of the population had not purchased and had no interest in acquiring a T-shirt featuring an image of the stunt-happy Putin, the poll showed, while 80 percent expressed no desire to purchase a traditional Russia nesting doll featuring their president's image.

All other Russian politicians trail far behind Putin in terms of voting intentions, according to the Levada Center. Gennady Zyuganov, the long-time head of Russia's Communist Party, would garner a mere five percent of the vote if snap elections were held. A mere one percent of those polled said they would vote for former Moscow mayoral candidate and opposition blogger Alexei Navalny, the poll found.

The survey also found that 45 percent of Russian voters would cast their ballot in favor of the ruling United Russia party in the event of snap elections for the State Duma. Another 12 percent would support the Communist Party, while 2 percent would vote for Navalny's Progress Party. The country's next parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place next year.

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