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Russia holds parliamentary vote in areas it seized from Ukraine



Russia's **parliamentary election** for the first time includes residents of regions that Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine after the start of its full-scale invasion more than 4 1/2 years ago, part of **Kremlin efforts to cement its gains**.

Officials in Kyiv vigorously denounced the action as illegal, and a human rights activist described residents there as being coerced to participate in the election.

While the vote across Russia started Friday and lasts until Sunday to help boost turnout, balloting actually has been underway in the annexed parts of Ukraine and some areas on the Russian side of the border since the end of last month. Officials cited security reasons for the extended period.

Russian authorities say the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia territories, often referred to by Moscow officials as the "new regions," have over 3.5 million voters.

They were annexed by Russia in September 2022, despite not fully being under Moscow's control. The move has not been recognized internationally.

At one polling station in the Russian-held part of the Donetsk region, voters dropped their ballots in a box as an armed Russian soldier stood nearby and watched.

Putin stressed the importance of voting in the regions

In a speech Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the importance of balloting in those regions for the State Duma, the lower house of parliament. Residents there will be voting for the Duma "for the first time since their reunification with Russia."

He noted that Russian soldiers involved in the fighting also will vote.

Voting also is taking place in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that was illegally annexed by

Moscow in 2014.

The first wartime election to the State Duma is intended to secure the Kremlin's political dominance and showcase public support for the war.

Authorities in Kyiv called the voting in those territories illegal

"Your choice and resolve will once again demonstrate that millions of people stand behind our fighters, that we are a united people, bound by shared values, historical memory, and love for the Motherland and that nobody can divide or intimidate us, undermine our statehood and political system," Putin said.

Authorities in Kyiv called the voting in those territories illegal and urged foreign governments and international organizations not to recognize the election. They warned Ukrainians that taking part in organizing the vote could carry criminal liability.