

# [***Putin Suffers Blow in Ukraine War Days Before Election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJ1-D6C1-JBR6-90CJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 651 words

**Byline:** Jon Jackson

**Highlight:** A group of pro-Kyiv fighters have claimed control of a Russian village, just days before Putin looks to be reelected.

**Body**

Russian President [*Vladimir Putin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/vladimir-putin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) has been handed several pieces of bad news in recent days, including claims on Tuesday from pro-Kyiv separatist fighters that they've seized control of a village in southern Russia.

The news regarding the village, as well as other war-related incidents, comes just days before Russian citizens take to the polls to cast their votes in the presidential election.

Putin is expected to win the election, set for Friday to Sunday, by a landslide. Opinion polls show Putin enjoys major support from his nation's citizens, but Western analysts have long accused Russia of rigging its elections.

However, polls also show support for the war Putin launched on Ukraine has dwindled, and recent negative news could have the Kremlin concerned.

"Putin's public support is built on the image of him being the pillar of stability in contrast to the wild days of the 1990s," Jason Jay Smart, an expert on post-Soviet and international ***politics***, told *Newsweek*.

"The invasion of southern Russia is a powerful demonstration that Putin's ability to maintain control of Russia is far less certain than what Putin would wish for us to believe."

The Freedom of Russia Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps—military groups made up of Russians fighting on behalf of Ukraine—announced on Tuesday that they were [*"on the attack" inside Russia*](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-belgorod-kursk-saboteurs-ukraine-raid-1878204?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Ukrainian and Russian sources said the groups had entered Russia's Belgorod and Kursk regions in armored vehicles. The War Gonzo Telegram channel reported the fighters were backed by mortar and artillery fire.

Later in the day, the Freedom of Russia Legion said it had fully taken control of the village of Tyotkino in the Kursk region, although Russia's Defense Ministry claimed earlier that it had "thwarted" attacks in border regions by "Ukrainian terrorist groups."

News of the military action taken by the separatist fighters comes after multiple overnight drone attacks inside Russia. According to reports from Moscow authorities, Ukrainian drones targeted sites in nine Russian regions in what's thought to Kyiv's [*largest drone assault*](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ukraine-drones-belgorod-oil-depot-attack-1878196?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Russia since the start of the war.

One of the targets in the drone attacks was reportedly a government building in Belgorod. The city's mayor later reported that four people had been killed by the strike.

The Institute for the Study of War ([*ISW*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/isw?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)) think tank wrote on Saturday that Ukrainian forces had reportedly conducted drone attacks the night before in Russia's Rostov Oblast that may have struck an aircraft plant refurbishing A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft. Two A-50s were reportedly destroyed as a result.

George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government professor Mark N. Katz told *Newsweek* that "the outcome of the Russian presidential election is not in doubt, but these attacks on Russian territory certainly must be embarrassing to Moscow."

"Whether they affect voter turnout is unclear, but I have no doubt that Moscow would manipulate the figures if it did," Katz said. "Perhaps more than anything else, these attacks on Russian territory are designed to buoy the spirits of Ukrainians who now see Russian forces gaining ground in Ukraine while vital [*U.S. military*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/u.s.-military?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) assistance is stalled in the House."

Smart said these incidents could also contribute to the erosion of war support among the Russian public.

"Russians themselves, undoubtedly, recognize that their war against Ukraine made today's actions justifiable and must be alarmed that their own Russian soldiers cannot defend them because they are busy illegally occupying Ukraine," he said.

Smart continued: "Just days before the sham 'elections' in Russia, Putin has suffered another humiliation on par with [*Wagner Group*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/wagner-group?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) leader [*Yevgeny Prigozhin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/yevgeny-prigozhin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s attempted coup and the last attempt that Ukraine made to send troops into Russia.

"Russia is unstable."

*Newsweek* reached out to the Kremlin via email on Tuesday for comment.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2361152/vladimir-putin-pictured-moscow.jpg)

**Graphic**

Vladimir Putin pictured in Moscow

Photo by MIKHAIL METZEL/POOL/AFP via Getty Images

In this pool photograph distributed by Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik, Russian President Vladimir Putin is seen in his residence in Moscow, Russia, on March 8, 2024. Claims of a pro-Kyiv fighters taking control of a Russian village bring more negative news for Putin days before Russia votes in the country's presidential election.

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