#### "Today a referendum, tomorrow - recognition as part of the Russian Federation, the day after tomorrow - strikes on the territory of Russia become a full-fledged war between Ukraine and NATO with Russia, untying Russia's hands in all respects," she said in a post on Telegram.

Msn, 21, Msn, , Msn, Last assessed 2021,[ https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/occupied-regions-announce-votes-to-join-russia-in-the-wake-of-ukrainian-advances/ar-AA122eOC] Kut.io

**Kremlin-controlled areas of southern and eastern Ukraine announced Tuesday they would stage votes this week on formally joining Russia, moves that were cheered in Moscow and dismissed by Kyiv and its allies as a desperate attempt to stem the tide of a successful counteroffensive by Ukrainian troops.**President Vladimir Putin meanwhile urged defense industry chiefs to boost military production and Russia's parliament approved a bill to toughen punishments for a host of crimes, including desertion, if they are committed during periods of mobilization or martial law.The sudden flurry of activity signaled that the Kremlin could be preparing to dramatically intensify its efforts in a conflict that has dragged on for nearly seven months and recently tilted away from its forces.Its public backers delighted in the prospect of an “all-out war” and a new confrontation with the West, which warned holding “sham” votes in those areas would represent an illegal escalation.It was unclear what impact holding such votes would have on the ground, with analysts suggesting the sudden moves may betray a growing concern over how much longer Russia’s struggling military can maintain control over the land it has occupied.Separatist officials in the eastern areas of Luhansk and Donetsk, as well as the southern Kherson region and partially occupied Zaporizhzhia, announced they would hold the votes over four days starting Friday, Russia’s state news agency Tass reported.It wasn't clear if the proposed annexation would cover the entire territory of the provinces or only the areas currently occupied by Russian forces.© Nikolai Trishin Image: Public Chamber asks Donetsk People's Repulic to hold referendum on accession to Russia (Nikolai Trishin / Zuma Press)  
  
The swift developments come just a week after Ukraine successfully reclaimed swaths of territory in the northeastern Kharkiv province, in what many observers said could be a decisive shift after more than six months of grinding war that has exposed Russian military vulnerability and provoked criticism from even fervent Kremlin supporters back home.Kyiv has been boosted by Western-supplied weapons, including long-range rocket systems supplied by the U.S., leading voices on Russian state media to argue that the country is fighting not just Ukraine but NATO as well.Washington condemned the planned votes as a "sham" it would never recognize."We are aware of reports that President Putin may be preparing to enact mobilization measures.Like its sham annexation planning, this is reflective of Russia’s struggles in Ukraine," said White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.French President Emmanuel Macron also said the international community would never recognize the votes, calling them "cynical" and "a parody."Speaking in New York, where world leaders are attending the United Nations General Assembly, Macron told reporters that if the "idea wasn’t so tragic it would be funny."Putin has so far resisted calls from nationalist voices and pro-military bloggers for general mobilization, a move that could boost his ailing forces but may prove unpopular with the Russian public and come across as an admission that his campaign in Ukraine is failing.One of the Kremlin’s most hawkish figures, former President Dmitry Medvedev, said Monday that holding the referendums is “of great importance,” while signaling that absorbing the Donbas provinces would make encroaching on them equivalent to striking Russia, raising the risk of further escalation if Ukrainian troops continue to advance in the area.The editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-backed channel RT, Margarita Simonyan, who has been one of the most vocal proponents of the war, also invoked the idea of red lines, saying holding the referendums immediately and without delay was key.“Today a referendum, tomorrow — recognition as part of the Russian Federation, the day after tomorrow — strikes on the territory of Russia become a full-fledged war between Ukraine and NATO with Russia, untying Russia’s hands in all respects,” she said in a post on Telegram.News of the planned referendums was condemned by Kyiv.“Sham ‘referendums’ will not change anything,” Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said.“Ukraine has every right to liberate its territories and will keep liberating them whatever Russia has to say,” he said in a tweet.The head of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s office, Andriy Yermak, said the referendums are part of Russia’s “naïve blackmail.”  
  
“This is what the fear of defeat looks like,” Yermak wrote in a post on the Telegram messaging app.The urgency of the move to have Moscow annex the occupied areas suggests that Ukraine’s ongoing counteroffensive is “panicking proxy forces and some Kremlin decision-makers,” according to the Institute for the Study of War, a U.S.-based military think tank.“The Kremlin may believe that partial annexation could drive recruitment of additional forces, both from within Russia and from within newly annexed Ukrainian territory," the institute added in its Monday assessment.“This is the reaction to the fact that they cannot hold territory with the current conventional forces that they have, so they have to create this additional safeguard by annexing this territory formally,” said Orysia Lutsevych, a research fellow at the London think tank Chatham House.“They want to make the territories Russian proper, so that then they can threaten with nuclear blackmail,” she added.© Yasuyoshi Chiba Image: TOPSHOT-UKRAINE-RUSSIA-CONFLICT-WAR (Yasuyoshi Chiba / AFP - Getty Images)  
  
Russia held a vote to annex the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, with most of the international community rejecting the results.But this time, the referendums come amid a full-scale invasion.Russia captured the entire Luhansk region in July after fierce fighting, and has been battling Ukraine’s forces in neighboring Donetsk.The two provinces together form the industrial Donbas region, which Moscow has made the primary goal of what it calls its “special military operation” since failing to seize the capital, Kyiv.Russian-backed separatists in the region have been fighting Ukrainian forces in a deadly conflict since 2014.Putin recognized the independence of the breakaway regions in the buildup to his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February.**On Monday, Ukrainian officials said its forces liberated a village in Luhansk, depriving Russia of full control of the region.**The village sits just 7 miles west of the city of Lysychansk, which saw weeks of intense fighting between the two sides before falling to Russian troops this summer.NBC News has not verified the claim.This article was originally published on NBCNews.com