

NEWS ANALYSIS

Little Choice But for Putin To Win Huge

Election Distorts Scale of Support by Russians

By PAUL SONNE

The Kremlin stage-managed Russia’s presidential vote over the weekend to send a singular message at home and abroad: that President Vladimir V. Putin’s support is overwhelming and unshakable, despite or even because of his war against Ukraine.

From the moment the preliminary results first flashed across state television late Sunday, the authorities left no room for misinterpretation. Mr. Putin, they said, won more than 87 percent of the vote, his closest competitor just 4 percent. It had all the hallmarks of an authoritarian Potemkin plebiscite.

The Kremlin may have felt more comfortable orchestrating such a large margin of victory because Mr. Putin’s approval rating has climbed during the war in independent polls, owing to a rally-around-the-flag effect and optimism about the Russian economy. The Levada Center, an independent pollster, reported last month that 86 percent of Russians approved of Mr. Putin, his highest rating in more than seven years.

But while the figures may suggest unabiding support for Mr. Putin and his agenda across Russia, the situation is more complex than the numbers convey. The leader of one opposition research group in Moscow has argued that backing for Mr. Putin is actually far more brittle than simple approval numbers suggest.

“The numbers we get on polls from Russia don’t mean what people think they mean,” said Aleksei Minyailo, a Moscow-based opposition activist and co-founder of a research project called Chronicles, which has been polling Russians in recent months. “Because Russia is not an electoral democracy but a wartime dictatorship.”

In a late January survey, Chronicles asked one group of Russian respondents what they wanted in key policy areas and a different group what they expected.

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Trump Unable To Raise Bond For Fraud Fine

This article is by Ben Protess, Maggie Haberman and Kate Christobek.

Donald J. Trump’s lawyers disclosed on Monday that he had failed to secure a roughly half-billion dollar bond in his civil fraud case in New York, raising the prospect that the state could seek to freeze some of his bank accounts and seize some of his marquee properties.

The court filing, coming one week before the bond is due, suggested that the former president might soon face a financial crisis unless an appeals court comes to his rescue.

Mr. Trump has asked the appeals court to pause the \$454 million judgment that a New York judge imposed in the fraud case last month, or accept a bond of only \$100 million. Otherwise, the New York attorney general’s office, which brought the case, might soon move to collect from Mr. Trump.

Still, even if the higher court rejects his appeal, Mr. Trump is not entirely out of options. He might

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Shining Moments Await

Get ready for the N.C.A.A. basketball tournaments with a preview detailing the star power of the women and the specter of change for the men, plus a look at the brackets.

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New Havana Syndrome Studies

Findings from the National Institutes of Health, which reported no evidence of brain injuries, are at odds with previous research.

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VW Workers Seek Union Vote

The United Automobile Workers said a “supermajority” at a Tennessee factory had backed joining the union.

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Marketplace’s Hold on Gen Z

For a generation that loves thrift-shopping, Facebook isn’t a place to socialize: It’s a place to score deals.

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New York’s Cannabis Mess

Gov. Kathy Hochul ordered a review of the way the state licenses dispensaries after calling the program’s sluggish rollout a “disaster.”

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Phasing Out a Carcinogen

The Biden administration finalized a ban on the last type of asbestos still used in the United States.

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An Icebreaker in Spaceflight

Thomas P. Stafford of Apollo 10 later led a milestone U.S.-Soviet mission during the Cold War. He was 93.

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With Jeremy Strong and Michael Imperioli starring, Ibsen’s “An Enemy of the People” is still making trouble.

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A professor dreamed of owning all of Katsushika Hokusai’s “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji.” Now he’s selling.

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Putting Excess Power Aside

To decarbonize the electrical grid, companies are finding creative ways to store energy when demand is low.

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A Family Home as Repayment

States are required to seek reimbursement from the assets of some Medicaid beneficiaries after their deaths.

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Linda Thomas-Greenfield

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AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A Palestinian woman with a boy wounded in the bombardment of Gaza City on Monday. Israel raided the city’s Al-Shifa Hospital.

With Gaza Famine ‘Imminent,’ Experts Warn of Rising Deaths

This article is by Gaya Gupta, Shashank Bengali and Thomas Fuller.

The acute food shortage in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip has become so severe that “famine is imminent” and the enclave is on the verge of a “major acceleration of deaths and malnutrition,” a report from a global authority on food security and nutrition said on Monday.

The group, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification global initiative, which was set up in 2004 by U.N. agencies and international relief groups, has sounded the alarm about famine only twice before: in Somalia in 2011 and in South Sudan in 2017.

The warning came as Israeli forces again raided Al-Shifa Hospital in the northern part of the enclave on Monday, in an operation that they said had been aimed at senior Hamas officials who had regrouped on the premises, setting off an hourslong battle that

Dire Outlook in Report as Fighting Rages Near Hospital

both sides said had resulted in casualties.

The raid at Al-Shifa, in Gaza City, raised questions about the level of control that Israeli forces have over northern Gaza. In December, the Israeli military said it was nearing “full operational control” there.

Taken together, the fighting and the severe food shortage underlined the chaos and desperation in Gaza after 23 weeks of war. The United Nations’ secretary general, António Guterres, renewed his call on Monday for “an immediate humanitarian cease-fire” and said that the report on imminent famine was “an appalling indictment of conditions on the

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Gambia Moves Toward Voiding Ban on Female Genital Cutting

By RUTH MACLEAN

DAKAR, Senegal — Gambian lawmakers have voted to advance a law revoking a ban on female genital cutting by removing legal protections for millions of girls, raising fears that other countries could follow suit.

Of the 47 members of the Gambia National Assembly present on Monday, 42 voted to send a bill to overturn the ban onward to a committee for consideration before a final vote. Human rights experts, lawyers and women’s and girls’ rights campaigners say that overturning the ban would undo decades of work to end female genital cutting, a centuries-old ritual tied up in ideas of sexual purity, obedience and control.

If it passes the final stages, the small West African nation of Gambia will become the first nation globally to roll back protections against cutting.

Government committees will be able to propose amendments

Would Become the First Nation to Roll Back Such a Protection

before it comes back to Parliament for a final reading in about three months — but analysts say that it has now passed the key stage: Its proponents will gain momentum and it will probably become law.

Gambia banned cutting in 2015 but did not enforce the ban until last year, when three practitioners were given hefty fines. An influential imam in the Muslim-majority country took up the cause and has been leading calls to repeal the ban, claiming that cutting — which in Gambia usually involves removing the clitoris and labia minora of girls between the ages of 10 and 15 — is a religious obligation and important culturally.

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Are Athletes Truly Employees? N.C.A.A. Ideal Faces Big Tests.

By BILLY WITZ

Robert McRae III has seen a lot. His grandmother, a civil rights activist in Los Angeles, often brought him along to rallies she organized and picket lines she walked — even to a gay pride parade with giant anatomical balloons that, he recalls with a smile, might not have been age appropriate.

As a Dartmouth College basketball player, he has played in N.B.A. arenas and historic arenas like Duke’s Cameron Indoor Stadium and Philadelphia’s Palestra.

Earlier this month, though, McRae’s eyes grew even wider. Photographers snapped images of him and his teammates as they walked together to cast votes to become the first college athletes to unionize. Hours later, after his team’s final game of the season, he was surrounded by a small group of reporters who posed questions about labor and employment.

“It has a little wow to it,” McRae said of the attention.

The unionization vote is only the start of a high-stakes battle that is playing out on both coasts as some of the most consequential challenges to college sports’ ama-



ADAM GRAY/GETTY IMAGES

Robert McRae III of Dartmouth, whose team unionized.

teur model take place in an unusual venue: the National Labor Relations Board, the federal agency that has jurisdiction over private employers.

Dartmouth has signaled it will be digging in to fight the ruling that its men’s basketball players be recognized as employees, “even if we have to go to court to do so,” a spokesman said in an email. The college has recently hired the law firm that is representing the University of Southern California, as well as SpaceX,

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