

Vladimir Putin Won Russian Elections

Why In News

- **Russian President Vladimir Putin**, 71, won the recent Presidential elections by securing 87.97 per cent of the votes, results declared on Sunday (March 17) showed. With a six-year term set to follow, he will become Russia's longest-serving leader in more than 200 years.



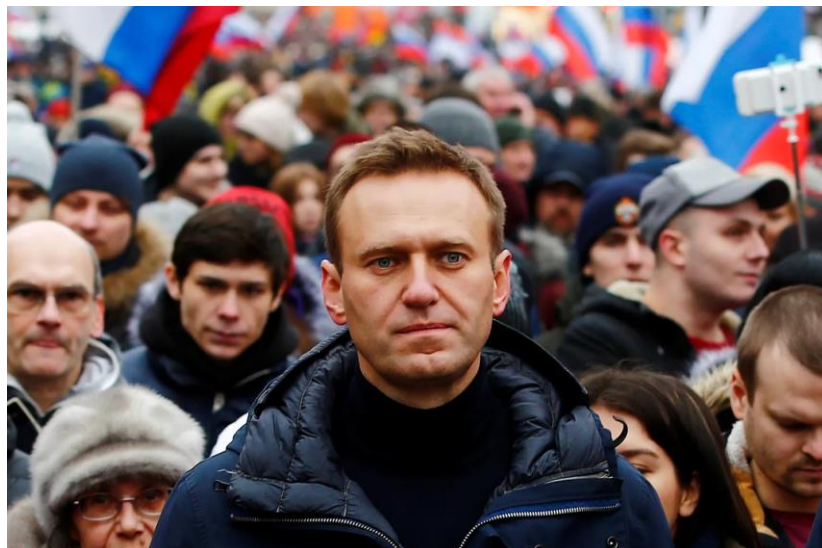
- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated** Putin on Monday. "Look forward to working together to further strengthen the time-tested Special & Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia in the years to come," he said in a post on X.
- **Leaders of China and North Korea** also congratulated the Russian President. The United States, meanwhile, denounced the polls.



- A White House National Security Council spokesperson said, “The elections are obviously not free nor fair given how Mr. Putin has imprisoned political opponents and prevented others from running against him.”
- The US reaction comes after similar criticism by European allies who questioned the conduct of the election.
- **top three candidates** of this year’s elections, in terms of the vote share they pulled after Putin Nikolai Kharitonov, Vladislav Davankov, Leonid Slutsky.



Alexei Navalny



Russia

- Russia continues to be one of the **main suppliers of defence hardware** to India, which has moved to diversify the sources of such equipment by concluding big-ticket deals with the US, France and Israel in recent years.
- Moscow also emerged as one of the leading suppliers of energy after India snapped up discounted Russian crude when Western states slapped sanctions on Russia after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.



- Despite harsh Western sanctions, Russia's economy has grown during the war. As a major growth engine, the Russian defence sector has been producing missiles, tanks, and ammunition nonstop.



Challenges Faced

- UKRAINE WAR** - Russia controls nearly a **fifth of Ukraine**, barely changed since late 2022. Putin has not defined territorial goals but his ally **Dmitry Medvedev** said last month that Russia aimed to bite off much more of Ukraine, including Odesa and eventually Kyiv. Putin could just let the war grind on, calculating that time is on his **side and awaiting the outcome of the U.S.** election in November. Russia made its first advance in nine months by capturing the town of Avdiivka in February and Putin has said it February and Putin has said it will press further. **Ukraine is running low on ammunition** as a big U.S. aid package has been held up in Congress, and Russia has been encouraged by signs of discord and faltering resolve in the West.



- Putin could escalate by embarking on a new military mobilisation, on top of the **call-up of 300,000 men** he ordered in September 2022. But that first wave was chaotic and unpopular, prompting hundreds of thousands of Russians to flee abroad. The Kremlin has repeatedly said there is no need for a repeat. - Putin could seek a negotiated outcome. Russia has said this would have to be on its terms, leaving it in control of **captured Ukrainian territory, which Kyiv** has said it will never accept. Reuters exclusively reported last month that Putin had signalled to Washington that he was ready to agree a ceasefire that would freeze the war at current lines. Washington rejected this after contacts between intermediaries.

- TRADE AND ENERGY Challenge:** re-routing trade to blunt Western sanctions
 Russia has lost most of its lucrative European energy market because of sanctions and **the blowing-up of the Nord Stream gas pipelines**. Progress on three major projects will be a gauge of his success in pivoting Russian trade eastwards:
 - **A new "gas hub"** in Turkey to enable Russia to reroute its gas exports
 - A new pipeline, the **Power of Siberia 2**, to bring another 50 billion cubic metres a year of Russian gas to to China via Mongolia
 - An expansion of the **Northern Sea Route**, made possible by the melting of Arctic sea ice, to link Murmansk near Russia's border with Norway to the Bering Strait near Alaska.



- NUCLEAR WEAPONS Challenge:** setting new security framework with U.S. or entering a new arms race. The **New START treaty** that caps the number of strategic nuclear warheads that Russia and the United States can deploy is due to expire in February. If it lapses, both sides could then expand their arsenals without limits.



- Putin has said **Russia must maximise its return** on defence spending to prevent the US from "exhausting" it in the kind of arms race that sapped the Soviet Union during the the Cold War. He said Russia was continuing to develop

"several new weapons systems", while denying U.S. assertions that he plans to deploy nuclear weapons in space. Putin has suggested that Russia might resume nuclear testing, but only if the U.S. does so first. Russia says it is ready to engage in "strategic dialogue" with the U.S. but that this must include all issues affecting its security, including Ukraine.

New START arms treaty

The U.S. Senate has ratified the new START treaty to reduce deployed strategic warheads by about 30 percent. The treaty must now be ratified by the Russian Duma; current stockpiles and reductions under the treaty:

What's affected



Not affected by treaty



Treaty would also

- Revive on-the-ground arsenal inspections
- Limit missiles, bombers, launchers capable of carrying nuclear warheads

Source: Arms Control Association

- **DOMESTIC ECONOMY Challenges:** inflation, labour shortages, demographics. The economy **grew 4.6% year-on-year** in January, thanks to a massive increase in military production, but labour shortages and low productivity pose problems. **Defence and security make up about 40% of the budget**, squeezing other areas like education and health.



- Wages are rising, especially in regions where defence industries are concentrated. But Putin has failed to deliver on a 2018 promise to achieve a "**decisive breakthrough**" in living standards, and real incomes overall have stagnated for the past decade. Near-term priorities are to cut inflation, running **at 7.6%**, and to **reduce budgetary** strains. Putin has signalled this will mean

higher taxes for firms and wealthier individuals. Further out, he wants to raise life expectancy and boost the birth rate with measures to support families, but is struggling to reverse Russia's long-term population decline.

- **RENEWING THE ELITE Challenge:** refreshing an ageing team. Putin will be 77 by the end of his new term - though still younger than U.S. President Joe Biden when he was sworn in. Some leading figures in Putin's circle are older than he is, including including FSB security chief Alexander Bortnikov (72), Security Council head Nikolai Patrushev (72) and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (74 this week). Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov (both 68) have kept their jobs despite fierce criticism from some pro-war commentators over Russia's military failings in Ukraine.



- Putin has long shown himself to be reluctant to shake up his team, and critics have accused him of prizing loyalty over competence. Younger figures to watch include parliament speaker Vyacheslav Volodin (60), agriculture minister Dmitry Patrushev (46) and Putin's former bodyguard Alexei Dyumin (51), the governor of Tula region. In a first significant personnel change, Kovalchuk, 46, the son of Putin's businessman friend Yuri Kovalchuk, left his post as head of the Inter RAO utility company this month after 15 years to join the presidential administration, Vedomosti newspaper reported.