

Putin's election rekindles Orthodox Church debate

by [Sophia Kishkovsky](#) in the [April 4, 2012](#) issue

Vladimir Putin's election to a third term as Russian president has spurred debates about civil society and church-state relations within the Russian Orthodox Church since charges of vote fraud set off mass protests following last December's parliamentary elections.

Andrei

Desnitsky, a theologian who supports demands for fair elections, said that growing political activism among Orthodox Christians is a positive outcome of the situation.

"Politically active Orthodox, who have finally begun to discuss with each other how to connect their political position with their faith, have gained from this," he wrote on Pravmir.ru (the English-language version is Pravmir.com), a Russian Orthodox news and analysis website on March 6.

Russia's Central

Election Commission reported that Putin won 63.6 percent of the vote in the March 4 elections. However, Putin's overwhelming victory has been tarnished by accusations of ballot tampering. He became prime minister in 2008 after serving two presidential terms.

In late December and

early January, Orthodox Patriarch Kirill I warned officials that they must heed demonstrators' demands and fight corruption, which led to speculation that he could play a major role as a mediator.

However,

following Putin's meeting with Russia's main religious leaders in February, Kirill curtailed his criticism, angering and baffling many

Russian Orthodox supporters of the protests. At the meeting, Kirill called the Putin era a "miracle of God."

Since the December vote, the Pravmir site has become a platform for political discussion. Heated arguments over the spiritual and political path Russia should take also have broken out on Facebook.

"Later they'll say that they wanted good things, benevolent reforms, and the improvement of morals among the rulers," wrote Maksim Kozlov, rector of the Church of the Martyr Tatiana, Moscow State University's parish church, who has been warning that today's opposition leaders are provoking a replay of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Sergei Chapnin, editor of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, an official monthly magazine of the Russian Orthodox Church, was attacked by Kozlov and Putin supporters in the church for writing on Facebook the morning after the elections that victory came at the price of buying "an impoverished electorate."

In an article published on the website of *Neskuchny Sad*, an Orthodox magazine that covers social issues, Chapnin wrote: "I look at Putin and I try to understand: will he want to, and will he be able to, become president of the entire country, and not just of his supporters. . . . To me, it's obvious that this goal cannot be achieved without a huge, titanic moral effort." —ENInews