

Medvedev Overtakes Putin

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President Dmitry Medvedev has taken a surprise lead over Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in a public opinion poll in Moscow, although he still trails his mentor nationwide.

The independent Levada Center said 27 percent of Muscovites polled in December were ready to vote for Medvedev in a presidential election, up from 17 percent in September and 12 percent in July. It polled 1,611 people.

At the same time, 16 percent were ready to vote for Putin, down from 29 percent in September and 24 percent in July.

Nationwide, Putin retained a lead with 31 percent support over Medvedev's 21 percent, although that was narrower than the 36 percent versus 17 percent support ratings seen in September.

Moscow, where more than 7 percent of all Russians live and earn twice the average national income, last summer suffered a record heat wave and forest fires that covered it in a deadly thick smog.

In December, only days before the Levada poll was conducted, Moscow saw the worst nationalist riots in its post-Soviet history, with police unable to stop aggressive youths who gathered just outside the Kremlin from beating non-Russians.

Putin and Medvedev, who remain the country's most popular politicians, have said they will decide among themselves who will run in the 2012 presidential election.

Putin and Medvedev are very likely to take some guidance from their public approval ratings when making the decision.

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