

Approval Ratings for Tandem Hit Low

January 26, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

Approval ratings dropped to their lowest for President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in January although their popularity is still around 70 percent each, a poll showed on Wednesday.

Of 1,600 Russians polled by the Independent Levada Center between Jan. 21 and 24, before a suicide bomber killed 35 at Moscow's busiest airport on Monday, 69 percent approved of Medvedev as president, down from December's 75 percent.

Putin's rating was at its lowest point since he became premier in 2008 when he hit the constitutional limit of a third term in the Kremlin. The January poll showed 72 percent approval for his leadership compared with 79 percent in December.

His ratings stayed well over 80 percent throughout 2008.

A sociologist with the pollster said this month's drop reflects discontent over inflation and rising utility prices as well as a more pessimistic outlook as Russia's struggles to recover from a 7.9 percent fall in growth in 2009.

"I think people received their utilities bills and these had once again grown," Alexei Grazhdankin, the deputy head of the Moscow-based Levada Center, told Reuters.

He said that Russians, who had grown used to a steady improvement in their living standards amid rapid economic growth from 2006–2008, were now faced with the shock of contraction.

However, when asked to name the country's most trustworthy politicians, 40 percent of Russians named Putin, 58, while 35 percent said they chose his successor Medvedev, 45.

The country's two most popular politicians have said they will decide between themselves which of them will run in 2012 presidential elections. The winner is likely to stay in office until 2024.

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