

United Russia's Rating Drops

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The  **Moscow Times**

The popularity of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's United Russia party fell in January to its lowest point in more than a year, an opinion poll showed Wednesday.

If an election were held next Sunday, 35 percent of all Russians would vote for the party, 10 percentage points fewer than in December 2010, said independent polling center Levada.

Nearly a third of respondents said they did not know who they would vote for — if anyone at all. The poll was carried out among 1,600 adults across 130 towns on Jan. 21 to 24 and has a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

In a separate category that includes only those who said they would definitely vote, 57 percent said they would do so for United Russia, which would still hand the party a solid victory in an election.

The Communist Party would come in second if an election were held on Sunday, collecting 20 percent of the vote, it showed.

State Duma elections are planned for December this year. The presidential vote is slated for

March 2012.

Despite the drop, United Russia said it was confident.

"For us, the best indicator of the party's rating is the support of the people," party spokesman Sergei Neverov said in a statement, adding that 57 percent was still "a high figure."

The party coasted to easy victory in 2007 elections largely because of Putin's popularity during his presidency from 2000 to 2008.

Levada Center said United Russia's fall in popularity was linked with annual price hikes that occur usually after New Year's.

Russians, who saw steady improvement in their living standards amid rapid economic growth, especially in 2006 to 2008, are chafing at the aftereffects of economic contraction.

The economy grew 4 percent last year following a contraction of nearly 8 percent in 2009 during the global economic crisis.

The bulk of the Levada poll was carried out before a suicide bomb in Moscow's Domodedovo Airport last week killed 36 people. Authorities have blamed North Caucasus Islamist rebels for the attack, though no one has taken responsibility.

Approval by Russians of Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev also dropped to their lowest in January, though both remain around 70 percent each, a Levada poll showed last month.

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