

Apathy at a High Ahead of Duma Vote

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

April 12, 2011



A booth at a Moscow polling station during the 2008 presidential vote. **Igor Tabakov**

Two-thirds of the population take no interest in politics or public life, and the rest rarely go beyond voting in elections, according to a new VTsIOM survey that shows a rapid rise in apathy over the past four years.

Sixty-one percent of respondents said they ignore politics, up from 39 percent in 2007, the state-owned pollster said.

The main reason for apathy is simply “a lack of interest,” cited by 36 percent of those polled, compared with 20 percent in 2007. Another 25 percent believe that any activism would be futile, while 18 percent say they simply do not know enough about politics.

The results could prove worrisome to current leaders hoping to win a strong mandate in State Duma elections in December and the presidential vote in 2012.

Interestingly, the number of Russians who believe that politics is “dirty business” remained

virtually unchanged at 58 percent in 2011, compared with 59 percent in 2007, the poll found.

Among people who participate in public life, 27 percent limited their activity over the past year to voting. The figure has been gradually slipping after peaking at 55 percent in 2004, a showing that neither the State Duma elections in 2007 nor the presidential vote of 2008 managed to top.

Eight percent said they participated in events to improve their neighborhoods, while 4 percent collected donations for the needy or victims of disasters.

Only 1 to 2 percent participated in political campaigning, local self-government, trade unions, public rallies or signed open petitions. No respondents acknowledged involvement with political parties, worker strikes or events staged by religious communities.

The survey polled 1,600 respondents in 46 regions and had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

Calls to VTsIOM went unanswered Tuesday. Sergei Mitrokhin, leader of the opposition Yabloko party, said authorities encourage the public to be passive.

“The public is demoralized by the authorities, who, in turn, prefer to keep it this way because they are used to function without public approval,” Mitrokhin said by telephone.

Public apathy is already reflecting on political ratings. Support for President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and the ruling United Russia party — while high — has been slipping since January. United Russia won the latest major regional vote in March, but less convincingly than in previous years.

But it is the active minority, not the passive masses, that the ruling elite is worried about, said Mark Feigin, a political analyst and a member of the Solidarity opposition group.

Political activists may number 2 to 5 percent of the populace, but they are capable of leading others behind them — if they could only reach accord among themselves, he said by telephone. “Those people who could lead the change and inspire others are still divided,” he said.

Feigin said some in the business elite are also activist-minded, even though an unwritten contract with the government limits them from engaging in politics.

Pro-Kremlin political analyst Igor Yurgens suggested the same in a recent interview with The Moscow Times. “Part of the elite does not simply want to make money but thinks about the country’s future, pompous as it may sound,” Yurgens said last week.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/04/12/apathy-at-a-high-ahead-of-duma-vote-a6280>