

Individual Rights Increasingly Valued by Russians, Poll Shows

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The majority of Russians think that individual rights need to be protected even if they contradict the interests of the state, with political rights growing increasingly important in the nation's perception, a recent poll has shown.

About 46 percent of Russians think that people have the right to fight for their rights, even if they go against the interests of the state, while another 15 percent take an even stronger view, saying individual rights should be enshrined above the interests of the state, according to a survey posted Monday on the Levada Center website.

Only 7 percent of respondents said the interests of the state were more important than the rights of the individual— compared to 11 percent who said so in 1999 — and after decades of Soviet-era propaganda pushing self-sacrifice for the vague and general interests of the country, the findings have come as a surprise to some Russians.

"The results are pleasing. Unexpectedly," a reader on the Ekho Moskvyy radio website said.

Among the human rights that the Russians consider to be particularly important, the values of a democratic state, the right to receive information, and voting rights — which had existed only on paper during the Soviet times — have been growing steadily more popular during the past two decades, Levada Center polls have shown.

About 39 percent of Russians consider the freedom of speech as one of the most important human rights, compared to 18 percent in 1994, with 27 percent saying the right to receive information was highly important, compared to 8 percent in 1994. The right to elect people's representatives to the ruling bodies was named as a highly important right by 21 percent, compared to 9 percent in 1994.

But many Russians still attach a higher importance to economic entitlements and social safety nets.

About 65 percent of respondents named the right to free healthcare, free education and retirement or disability benefits as a fundamentally important human right, while 53 percent of respondents named "the right to a well-paying job" as particularly important one. Those numbers marked little change from the results of the past two decades.

The number of respondents who selected the right to life as a particularly important human right totaled 69 percent in the latest poll, compared to 63 percent in 1994.

The poll, which was conducted in late December among 1,603 people from 45 Russian regions, gave a margin of error of 3.4 percent.

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