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Polls Track Dissent Rising With Prices

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The public is beginning to react to rising food and utility prices more sharply than it did just a few months ago. **Denis Grishkin**

Prices are rising quickly and, in February, every second person (49 percent) was dissatisfied and ready to participate in a protest, according to a Public Opinion Foundation survey of 3,000 people from 204 towns on Feb. 19-20.

As recently as December, that figure was only a third (32 percent).

In response to the question, "If next Sunday, there were to be a meeting, demonstration or protest where you live, would you take part?" 24 percent said yes. In December, only 16 percent said they would; in January, 18 percent.

The number of Russians who felt their financial situation worsen went from 28 percent to 34 percent over the month. The number of those expecting their finances to improve fell from 26 percent to 17 percent. Only 18 percent were proud of their personal savings (20 percent in January), and almost one-third acknowledged that their savings were shrinking.

In late February, 96 percent of Russians felt a rise in prices for basic foods, goods and services (versus 86 percent in December), according to the Public Opinion Foundation. More than four-fifths had no doubt that the inflation would continue.

According to a VTsIOM survey of 1,600 people from 138 towns, 80 percent of Russians view inflation as very high. The No. 1 factor was rising costs of utilities, noted by 81 percent of respondents. "The February inflation estimates were some of the most negative over the entire period of record," VTsIOM analysts said. Such a critical level was also felt in June-July 2008 (78 to 81 percent).

Sixty percent of respondents said the prices of goods they usually buy increased 15 to 25 percent on average. About 13 percent said prices have more than doubled. Another 16 percent saw a 5 to 10 percent increase in the price of basic goods. No one felt that prices remained the same or decreased.

The rising cost of utilities was felt the most, according to 81 percent of respondents. Also noted were rising prices for fruits and vegetables, as well as meat and meat products (68 and 64 percent). More than half of respondents saw serious increases in the cost of milk and dairy products (57 percent) and gasoline (56 percent). For bread, 43 percent noted a slight price increase.

According to the State Statistics Service, from the beginning of the year until Feb. 21, inflation amounted to 3.1 percent, compared with 2.4 percent during the year-ago period.

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