The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Increasingly, Russians See No Alternative to Putin

January 15, 2015

Russia's President Vladimir Putin

Though it will be another three years before Russian voters cast their ballots for the next round of presidential hopefuls, most people already know whom they plan to vote for.

More than half of Russians would prefer to keep President Vladimir Putin at the country's helm after the 2018 elections and believe there is no other politician capable of replacing him, according to a poll released Thursday by the independent Levada Center.

The poll, conducted between Dec. 19 and 22 among 1,600 people, revealed a major increase in the number of those hoping Putin will remain in power, even in light of the recent economic downturn. Fifty-five percent of respondents said they want him to remain in the post of president after 2018, compared with 32 percent last March.

The strong show of support for Putin at home comes as the West has largely turned against him over events in eastern Ukraine, where the United States and the European Union say armed separatists have enjoyed support from the Kremlin. While Putin has been losing favor

abroad since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March, his domestic support has skyrocketed, with approval ratings hitting record highs.

Yet Thursday's poll suggests that some of the domestic support stems from the perception shared by 54 percent of respondents that there is simply no alternative to Putin. A mere 10 percent of respondents said they could think of someone worthy of facing off with Putin. Another 24 percent said such a person could be found if necessary.

Ten percent of respondents said they'd like to see another person take the reins, but one who would implement policies similar to those favored by Putin.

Eighteen percent of respondents said they want a president who would offer "a different solution for Russia's problems." The poll's margin of error did not exceed 3.4 percent.

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