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More Russians See Potential for Political Protests in Their Country, Poll Shows

By Jennifer Monaghan

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A man with a sticker reading "Putin" on his mouth takes part in an opposition rally in Moscow, in this Oct. 27, 2013 file photo.

The number of Russians who see potential for political protests to break out in their country has more than doubled in the past five months, a new survey showed Friday, though the majority would choose not to participate in them.

The survey, published Friday by state-run pollster VTsIOM, showed that 27 percent of Russians could envisage political protests taking place in their country, compared to just 14 percent in September.

At the same time, 77 percent of Russians say they would choose not to participate in any political demonstrations, citing a lack of information, a priority for personal concerns over public issues, fear of the use of force by police, and repercussions in the workplace as their main deterrents.

Ordinary Russians have been left feeling the pinch in recent months, with Western sanctions against Moscow and a global drop in the price of oil hitting Russia's economy especially hard.

In a gloomy sign of things to come, the IMF on Tuesday predicted the Russian economy will shrink by 3.5 percent this year, lowering its previous forecast of zero growth. But despite being faced with increasing food prices and stagnating pay packets, Russians do not necessarily see political protests as the best way to achieve change.

VTsIOM's survey showed Friday that there has been a distinct shift in people's attitudes to political protests from January 2012, a month after thousands of people gathered on Moscow's Bolotnaya Square to express their discontent with the Russian political elite.

At that time, 36 percent of Russians said in a similar poll that political protests were a viable way to achieve change. That number has now dropped to 23 percent, the VTsIOM survey showed Friday.

Now, almost a third of Russians say political protests are not a desirable way to solve the country's problems and will only lead to more upheaval, up from 22 percent in January 2012.

One of the main reasons for the change is the fallout from the so-called Euromaidan protests when thousands flocked to central Kiev's Independence Square to protest the regime of Ukraine's former president Viktor Yanukovych, the Vedomosti business daily cited VTsIOM head Valery Fedorov as saying Friday.

Since Yanukovych was ousted in February, Ukraine has been thrown into internal disarray with more than 5,000 people killed in fighting between pro-Russian separatists and government forces in the east of the country over the past 10 months, the United Nations said Friday.

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