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Chechen Leader Ramzan Kadyrov Losing Popularity Among Russians - Poll

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov

Ramzan Kadyrov is losing support among ordinary Russians, a new poll published Thursday showed, amid increasing concern that his aggressive response toward those who question his authority might spill outside Chechnya's borders.

Asked by the independent Levada Center pollster what they thought of Kadyrov, 17 percent of respondents said they felt "respect" and "sympathy." That figure was much higher a year ago, when 35 percent thought so, the poll published online showed.

Meanwhile, the number of respondents who said they felt "irritation" or "dislike" toward the Chechen warlord has doubled from last year, and is now at 10 percent.

Kadyrov earlier this month set off a chain of protest and tit-for-tat stunts in his support after he branded the Russian opposition "enemies of the people" and "traitors."

A large majority of those questioned by Levada who had heard of his statement, 58 percent,

said they did not consider it appropriate for a government figure to use such terms to describe critics of the regime.

Following Kadyrov's statement, a deputy in Russia's Krasnoyarsk publicly described Kadyrov as a “disgrace to Russia,” accusing him of being undeserving of his academic titles and of misusing government funds.

The deputy later retracted his words in a video uploaded to Kadyrov's Instagram account, but hinted the apology had been made under duress. The incident sparked concern that Kadyrov's iron-fisted approach to any questioning of his authority — widely applied in Chechnya — would spill outside Chechen borders.

Asked by Levada whether they thought the Russian deputy had been right in his criticism, 32 percent of those who had heard about the incident agreed, while 38 percent thought the accusations were unfounded.

Though Kadyrov's words received wide coverage in the Russian media, his drop in popularity cannot simply be explained by recent events — more than half of respondents, 53 percent, told Levada they had not heard anything about them. Deputy head of Levada, Alexei Grazhdankin, told the Vedomosti business daily that Kadyrov's popularity a year ago had largely been fueled by his patriotic rhetoric in support of Russia's role in the conflict in Ukraine.

“Now those statements have been forgotten, attitudes toward him have changed,” Grazhdankin was cited as saying.

With the Kremlin's aggressive rhetoric on Ukraine at a lower pitch — as Russia seems to be looking for an end to the conflict there — Russians are less prone to Kadyrov's militancy, especially when it concerns issues outside Chechnya, Vedomosti cited political analyst Alexei Makarkin as saying.

“He is not considered a national figure. People do not like the liberals, but to have their fates determined by Kadyrov goes one step too far,” Makarkin said.

The Levada poll was conducted Jan. 22 to Jan. 25 and questioned 1,600 people across 48 Russian regions. The margin of error did not exceed 3.4 percent.

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