The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

One in Five Russians Would Vote for Fake Putin Protege

September 20, 2017



Vladimir Putin **Kremlin Press Service**

Nearly one in five Russians would vote for a made-up Vladimir Putin protege in next year's presidential elections, an experimental Levada Center poll cited by the Vedomosti newspaper said on Wednesday.

The Central Elections Committee confirmed this week that the next presidential elections, in which Vladimir Putin is expected to seek and win a fourth term, will take place on March 18, 2018.

Levada's experiment showed that 18 percent of those polled were ready to cast their ballot for a fictional "Andrei Semyonov," Vedomosti reported. Another 15 percent said they were ready to support "Semyonov" having never heard of him.

Another 11 percent claimed to have heard of Semyonov, who the pollster suggested enjoys Putin's support. Levada sociologist Karina Pipiya told Vedomosti they may not be lying on

purpose but are either uninterested in politics or “are giving a socially approved answer.”

“But the two-thirds of Russians not ready to vote for this candidate are immune to majority pressure, and collective perceptions do not have a significant impact on their opinion."

Pipiya said the experiment was conducted in August to gain an understanding of “how the authority of the incumbent president spreads to electoral attitudes."

She said Levada plans similar polling experiments in the future.

Levada’s actual poll cited by Vedomosti showed that 48 percent of those surveyed in August were willing to vote for Putin. Putin’s support grew to 60 percent among those who plan to vote next March.

A think-tank last month ranked Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev as the most likely successor to Putin, followed by Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

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