

Kremlin Shrugs Off Rare Dent in Putin's Ratings Over Retirement Age Hike

By [Reuters](#)

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Kremlin

The Kremlin on Monday shrugged off a rare fall in President Vladimir Putin's popularity ratings caused by plans to raise the retirement age sharply, saying there was no need to dramatize the situation.

Putin "is not poring over his ratings," his spokesman said.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, a close ally, said on June 14 that the government wanted to raise the retirement age for men by five years, to 65 from 60, and for women by eight years, to 63 from 55. The rationale for the proposed reform was to ease intense pressure on state coffers.

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Announced on the day the football World Cup opened in Russia, critics accused Medvedev of trying to bury bad news, while surveys have since shown that around 90 percent of the population oppose the plan.

One survey, by the FOM pollster, showed on Thursday that the number of Russians who said they would vote for Putin had fallen by eight percent in a week to 54 from 62 percent and that his approval rating was down six percent to 69 from 75 percent.

Another, by the state VTsIOM pollster, showed on Friday that his approval rating had tumbled by around five percent. Nearly 2.5 million people have also signed a petition calling on Putin not to go ahead with the plan.

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Protests

Asked about the drop in Putin's ratings, Dmitry Peskov, his spokesman, was sanguine on Monday.

"I would not dramatize the situation," Peskov told reporters on a conference call. The proposed pension reform was a socially sensitive topic which had yet to be finalized.

"Of course, public sensitivity (about this issue) has an effect on the volatility of rating indicators. But you know that Putin has a really pragmatic attitude to this and the main thing for him is to continue working and carrying out his duties as head of state. He is not poring over his ratings."

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Though down, Putin's ratings still remain much higher than any of his political rivals.

Putin, who won a landslide re-election victory in March and is himself 65, said in 2005 that he would never agree to raise the retirement age while president.

When asked about Putin's apparent U-turn on the issue this month, Peskov, his spokesman, said that a lot of time had elapsed and the situation had changed.

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He said Putin had not been involved in drawing up the reform, which he said was still a work in progress.

The government hopes the changes will ease pressure on state finances which have been squeezed by fluctuating oil prices, Western sanctions, and a shrinking workforce whose tax take must support a growing number of pensioners.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny has called for people to take to the streets of 20 cities not

hosting World Cup matches on July 1 to protest against the plans and other forces -- politicians, trade unions and activists -- are organizing similar demonstrations.

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