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Russian Worries Over Poverty, Unemployment Reach Pre-1998 Crisis Levels

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Maxim Grigoryev / TASS

Russians are worried about rising prices, growing poverty and unemployment in levels not seen since the lead-up to the 1998 economic crisis that resulted in a severe economic downturn, according to a new poll by the independent Levada Center.

According to Lev Gudkov, head of the Levada Center, social tensions began to grow last year when the government made broad promises ahead of the March 2018 presidential elections.

More recently, Gudkov told the Kommersant business daily, unpopular government plans to raise the retirement age "in violation of an unspoken social contract" have inflamed people's worries.

Rising prices were the most pressing issue for 72 percent of respondents in the most recent poll, compared to 61 percent of respondents in 2017. Poverty came in second as the most

concerning issue (for 52 percent of people surveyed), followed by unemployment (which concerned 48 percent of respondents).

“This shows that tension levels have sharply increased,” Gudkov told Kommersant on Thursday. “It’s not just concern for a particular issue, but a general increase in anxiety and discontent.”

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This level of social discontent was last seen ahead of the 1998 financial default that led to a nationwide economic crisis, the sociologist said.

Around 30 percent of respondents were concerned both by corruption and the nation’s widening wealth gap.

About a quarter of respondents were worried about environmental issue, a spike from the 14 percent worried about the environment in a 2017 Levada poll.

Levada conducted the survey in late August among 1,600 respondents in 52 Russian regions.

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