

Medvedev Tells Governors to Please the People

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President Dmitry Medvedev has warned regional leaders that he is closely watching their approval ratings and hinted that they won't last long in the job if they cannot keep people happy.

Medvedev's remarks in an interview with state-run Rossia television suggested that the Kremlin is determined to avoid any significant rise in voter discontent ahead of State Duma elections next year and a 2012 presidential vote.

The warning came two weeks after the ruling United Russia party declined to nominate the governor of the Kaliningrad region, where a January protest that drew 10,000 people was one of the largest in Russia in years, for a new term.

Medvedev said some governors appeared to have decided that since they are appointed by the president, not popularly elected, "they can relax and not talk to the people — or if they talk, then rarely."

"But this is wrong," Medvedev said in the interview aired Monday night. Regional leaders "have to work with the people, and for this reason I long ago instructed the presidential administration to keep track of the ratings of governors."

"Of course, there is no direct mechanism here — 'Your rating has fallen, goodbye' — but it is cause for a governor to think about what's happening and how satisfied the people are with his actions," Medvedev said.

He said poll ratings were a "very important" factor in decisions on whether or not to keep incumbent governors in place when their terms expire.

Medvedev's predecessor, Vladimir Putin, abolished popular elections of governors, part of a series of moves that increased Kremlin control over the country's political system during his eight-year presidency.

Medvedev also said he supported a proposal by Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov to eliminate the title of president for regional leaders in favor of a uniform title for all regional leaders.

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