

Medvedev's Popularity Hits 76%, Close to Putin's 77%

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The  **Moscow Times**

President Dmitry Medvedev has an approval rating of 76 percent, just below Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's rating of 77 percent, according to a new poll.

This is the closest the two of them have been in the monthly survey by the respected Levada Center, although for much of this year their ratings have fallen within the margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

Levada Center sociologist Alexei Grazhdankin said the rise in Medvedev's approval rating may reflect the popularity of some of his recent actions, including his firing of Mayor Yury Luzhkov and efforts to reform the police, Vedomosti reported Thursday.

But Grazhdankin cautioned that it was too early to say that polls for Medvedev and Putin had now evened out.

Medvedev's approval rating was 73 percent in September.

Grazhdankin said if the country remained relatively stable, Russians would be content with Medvedev, who has made modernization his main focus. But if Russia were hit with another wave of terror attacks or armed conflict, people would look to Putin, who is seen as a strong defender of the Russian state.

When asked what kind of leader Russia needs, just over half of those polled said they favored someone who had a "strong hand" — in a sign that the public would want Putin.

Thirty-nine percent said Russia's leader should cooperate with all social and political powers, including the opposition.

Although technically now Russia's No. 2, Putin is still seen as the more powerful leader more than two years after handing over the presidency. The prime minister is eligible to return to the presidency in 2012, and he and Medvedev have said they will decide between themselves which one of them will run.

When asked who they would vote for in elections, 24 percent said they would vote for Putin, and 21 percent chose Medvedev.

The Levada poll of 1,600 Russians, conducted Oct. 22 to 25, was released Thursday.

(AP, Reuters)

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