

Putin's Front Aims to Add 15% to Ruling Party's Vote in December

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's All-Russia People's Front is seeking to raise support for his ruling party in December parliamentary elections by as much as 15 percentage points, a senior official said.

"If the front manages to achieve the task it was set up for — that is, to consolidate civil society and to listen to the views of people who aren't in United Russia — the front should be able to add 12-15 percentage points to the overall vote," Mikhail Babich, deputy leader of the movement, said in an interview late last week.

Putin formed the nationwide coalition of supporters in May amid falling popularity of United Russia, whose rating has fallen close to 40 percent after it won almost two-thirds of the vote four years ago. The prime minister, 58, who handed the presidency in 2008 to his protege, Dmitry Medvedev, has not ruled out a return to the Kremlin. Widening support of the party will bolster his standing, analysts say.

Putin "is our leader, in all senses of the word, our chief ideologue and the person who enjoys

the highest rating in the country and the love and respect of the people," said Babich, a member of United Russia.

The next nationwide parliamentary vote is scheduled for Dec. 4, three months before the presidential election in March. Putin picked Medvedev, a 46-year-old former corporate lawyer, to replace him as president because of a constitutional ban on serving more than two consecutive terms.

While the two men have said they will decide jointly which of them will run for the Kremlin in 2012, advisers to Medvedev have urged him to seek the endorsement of United Russia to secure re-election.

Medvedev has the backing of more educated, urban voters, and "of course the president's support is important to us so that this electorate will vote for our program," Babich said.

United Russia's support was at 41 percent two weeks ago, the Public Opinion Foundation said in a report posted on its web site Thursday. The survey was based on interviews with 3,000 people on Sept. 10 and 11. No margin of error was given. United Russia has a two-thirds majority in the State Duma, after receiving about 64 percent of the vote in 2007.

Medvedev's approval rating rose to 47 percent, the highest since May, the survey showed. Putin's approval was unchanged at 52 percent.

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