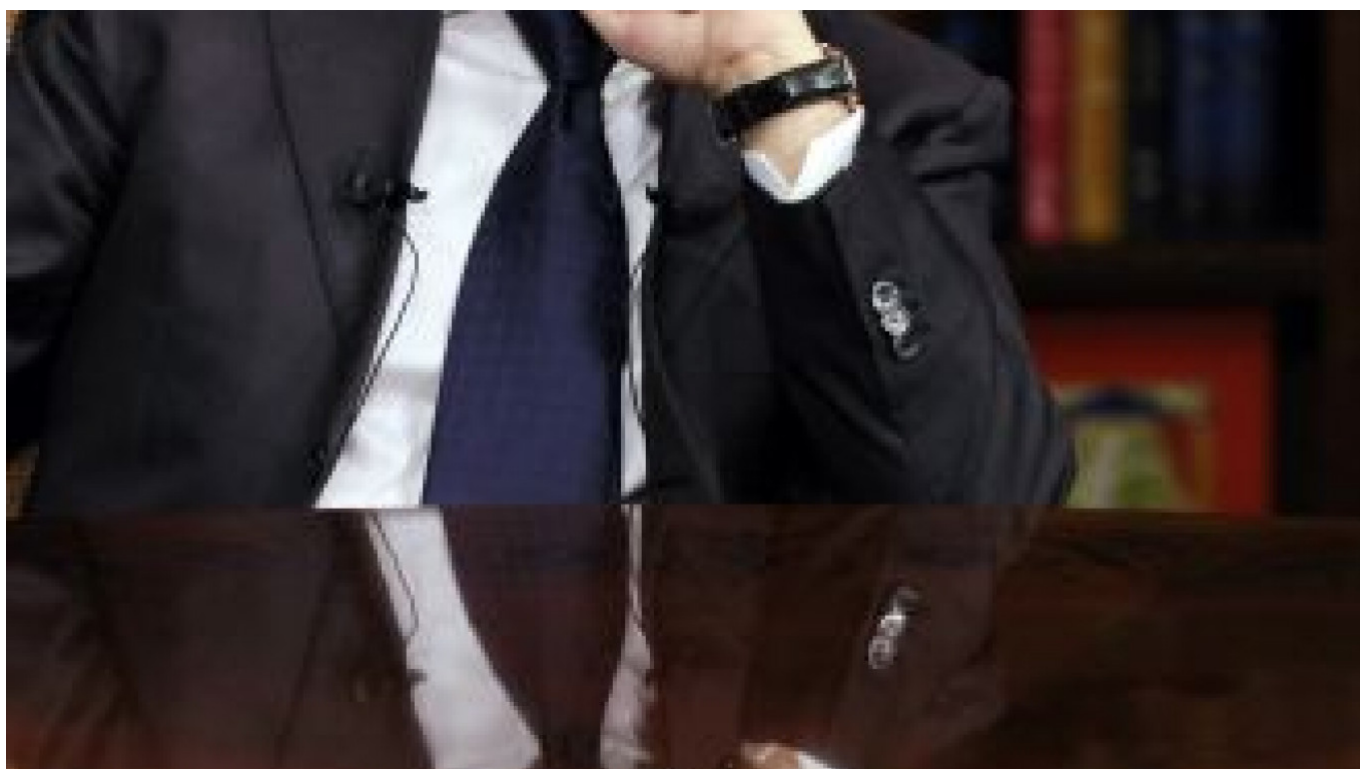


Medvedev Says Putin Is More Popular and Authoritative

By [Alexandra Odynova](#)

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Medvedev speaking with television chiefs at his Gorki residence Thursday. **Dmitry Astakhov**

President Dmitry Medvedev has defended his decision to shelve his political ambitions in favor of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, saying Putin deserved to become the next president because he is "the most authoritative politician" in the country.

Speaking to the directors of Russia's top three television channels, Channel One, Rossia and NTV, Medvedev [said](#) the decision to swap jobs with Putin was made for the sake of Russians' welfare.

"What is your ambition in making this decision?" asked long-serving Channel One head Konstantin Ernst.

"To bring benefit to my country and my people," Medvedev replied.

But speaking on, he compared his situation with Putin to the 2008 primaries in the United

States when Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton contested the Democratic Party's nomination for the presidency.

"Can you imagine if, for example, Barack Obama had started to compete with Hillary Clinton?" he said, meaning that if they had both run for the presidency. "Well, it's impossible for you to imagine this! They're both from the Democratic Party, so they made a decision based on who was capable of bringing the best result."

Unlike in the United States, however, neither Putin nor Medvedev participated in United Russia's recent primaries or have held any open debates.

Putin is "the most authoritative politician at the moment in our country. His rating is somewhat higher," Medvedev said.

Notably, according to the independent Levada Center pollster, Putin's rating has been stable at 68 percent over the past three months, while Medvedev's has ranged from 66 percent in July to 62 percent in September.

The state-run VTsIOM pollster found an even smaller gap of only 1 percent in a survey released Friday.

The difference between Medvedev and Putin in both polls is minuscule, considering that the margin of error for each was 3.4 percentage points.

Medvedev gave the interview, which was aired on the three channels during primetime Friday night, because he had no choice but to explain why he had stepped aside, said Alexei Makarkin, an analyst with the Center for Political Technologies.

"A motivation explaining the decision had to be announced," he said. "For voters who support United Russia, this will be enough."

Medvedev also addressed criticism over his declaration at a Sept. 24 United Russia convention, where he announced that he would pass the baton to Putin, that the swap had been tentatively decided before he ran for president in 2008. The acknowledgement prompted complaints that his presidency had been little more than a charade.

Medvedev said Friday that he and Putin had kept silent about the swap plan because of possible changes in voters' preferences.

Medvedev insisted that the results of the 2012 presidential election have not been prearranged. "The choice will be made by the people. These are not empty words," Medvedev said. "Any politician can lose during elections, as well as his political force. ... What kind of predestiny?"

But if Medvedev is aware of Putin's popular rating, he should also know that no other party stands a fighting chance against United Russia. In its latest poll, VTsIOM put the ruling party's rating at 41 percent, followed by the Communist Party with 13 percent and the other two parties with seats in the State Duma with even less.

Medvedev was chosen at the United Russia convention to lead the party's electoral list

of candidates for the Duma elections.

In addition, the Justice Ministry has repeatedly refused to register any opposition party for years over technicalities, thus banning them from running in the elections.

What is more, no other political force has such unlimited access to the Kremlin's propaganda machine as Medvedev and Putin. The president's 25-minute primetime interview caused the rescheduling of popular shows on the three national channels — a privilege the opposition is unlikely to get.

In his remarks, Medvedev emphasized that he remains a leader and will continue to lead even after the presidential election.

"The government must be renewed," Medvedev said, suggesting that his presidential policies have led to an overhaul of the governors and police force.

Last Monday, Medvedev ousted Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, who criticized Medvedev's defense spending and said he would not work in his Cabinet. The dismissal was formally approved by Putin.

In his Friday interview, Medvedev said Kudrin's resignation was "a case of state discipline and nothing else." Kudrin "overstayed his time in office and had become bored," seeking to resign back in February or March, Medvedev said. Kudrin said last week that Putin had rejected his request to quit earlier this year.

The jury was out Sunday on whether Medvedev had succeeded in proving his case.

"Medvedev has to prove now that he is a strong figure and signal that nothing will change after they swap jobs," Makarkin said, adding that the president faces a serious task in leading United Russia into the elections.

Gleb Pavlovsky, a political analyst and former Kremlin spin doctor, said the interview could not be treated seriously. "This is a case where you should ask a novelist for comment, not an analyst," he told a Kommersant reporter.

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