

As Approval Rating Falls, Putin Faces Runoff

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's job approval ratings have slid to an all-time low of 51 percent, and he will not win the presidential election without a runoff, according to the first nationwide survey taken since disputed State Duma elections sparked protests across the country.

The Dec. 10-11 poll, conducted by state-run VTsIOM, showed Putin winning the presidential election in March with 42 percent of the vote, forcing him into an embarrassing second round with Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, who garnered a mere 11 percent in the survey.

Putin avoided runoffs during his previous two presidential bids, winning 53 percent of the vote in 2000 (compared with 29 percent for second-place Zyuganov) and 71 percent in 2004 (Zyuganov didn't run, and his deputy, Nikolay Kharitonov, garnered 13 percent).

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov attributed his boss's low approval rating to the emotional

excitement of the elections. Peskov, speaking to RIA–Novosti on Friday, also [said](#) he was confident that Putin's approval ratings would rebound as Russians acknowledged the government's achievements.

A series of protests about the Duma elections this month have brought tens of thousands of people to the streets of Moscow and other cities in a show of discontent unprecedented in Putin's more than a decade in power.

Billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, who joined the race on Monday as the self-proclaimed champion of the disgruntled middle class — the engine behind post-election protests fueled by widespread allegations of fraud at the ballot box — scored a dismal 1 percent, according to the VTsIOM poll.

Putin's sinking popularity could weaken the legitimacy of his continued rule. Putin has traditionally enjoyed higher approval ratings than Western leaders, a fact that his supporters have often used to counter claims that his regime is undemocratic.

The latest poll numbers bring him closer to his Western counterparts, including U.S. President Barack Obama (approval rating of between [42 and 47 percent](#)), U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron (about [36 percent](#)), French President Nicolas Sarkozy (about [28 percent](#)) and German Chancellor Angel Merkel (about [60 percent](#)).

Putin began 2011 with a 68 percent approval rating, a number that has steadily declined along with approval ratings for his protege, President Dmitry Medvedev, which went from 66 percent to 51 percent during the same period, and the ruling United Russia party, which Putin heads without being a member.

The VTsIOM poll sampled 1,600 Russians in 138 cities across 46 regions and had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

The president of the Public Opinion Foundation has denied media reports that his organization would stop publishing the results of its weekly public opinion polls, which have showed Putin's popularity sliding. "It isn't true, it's simply a fake story," he [told](#) the opposition-minded Novaya Gazeta newspaper last week, refuting reports that cited anonymous sources within the organization. A Dec. 11 poll published by organization gave Putin a 52.8 percent approval rating.

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