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The Putin majority on the eve of the next electoral cycle

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The Civil Society Development Fund (FCDS) is continuing work on its analysis of the electoral and political phenomenon of The Putin majority. Preparation for this report involves the analysis of electoral statistics, socio-demographic characteristics, how Russians use the media, their political predilections - and how these are affected by place of residence. The specially commissioned research on the Putin majority, was carried out in April 2017 by Romir (which is the sole representative of the Gallup International Association in Russia and the CIS); the All Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VTsIOM); and the Fund for Public Opinion (FOM).

The Putin majority is a broad public and political coalition of citizens who support Vladimir Putin and who come from virtually every social group in Russian society. They are people who share his ideology and consistently support his political policies and programmes.

The Putin majority represents the most dynamic and high-profile section of the electorate and the greater part of Russian voters are uniting around it. This can be explained by an important attribute of the Putin Majority - a high degree of political participation and public and civic activity. The Putin Majority is now a stable phenomenon of Russia's socio-political life, which generally retains its key attributes and influences over all aspects of the political life of the country.

We can draw the following conclusions from the results of the study:

1. The Putin Majority is stable in structure: it is represented in all socio-demographic, professional and political strata of society and is relatively evenly distributed across all types of populated areas in the Russian Federation.

Contrary to the predictions of some experts, the difficult economic and foreign policy situation in the country did not result in diminishing support for the



incumbent President of the Russian Federation. On the contrary, research shows that existing hardships contributed to a consolidation of the Putin majority, and an influx of new supporters. The increase in the number of people who support Vladimir Putin is primarily due to the fact that more young people are behind him now, as are people who for one reason or another did not vote in previous elections.

2. The Putin majority is very politically active and is quick to mobilize within the framework of electoral procedures.

3. The Putin Majority will be the leading political force in the forthcoming major electoral cycle of 2017-2018. It will determine the results of the election of 'presidential nominees' in the regions of the Russian Federation, and will go on to play a decisive role in the country's main elections

4. President Vladimir Putin enjoys unparalleled support among the population. None of the potential opposition candidates in the forthcoming elections will pose any significant threat to the incumbent head of state. We can therefore conclude that the upcoming presidential campaign will have a referendum type quality to it. Studies show that the level of electoral support will be between 61-66%.

5. The Putin majority is totally representative of the population of Russia in that it exactly reflects their interests, problems, values and aspirations.

6. Research again confirms that the key values which were pivotal in the formation of the Putin majority can be structured as follows:

a) The Russian Federation is a state that independently determines the direction of its development in the interests of citizens of the country - free from the influence of any external political influence.

b) Patriotism is a fundamental element of the system of values of its citizens and the state as a whole.



c) Democracy is a social structure that ensures, as far as possible, that elected representatives of the people are in power in a complex society.

d) The market economy is a system that creates the most favorable conditions for improving quality of life.

e) Social justice and social guarantees are available to all Russians.

f) Stability is seen as a necessary condition for the implementation of all the previous principles, and to ensure continuous development and progress in the country.

7. If President Putin does not stand in the forthcoming presidential elections, the Putin Majority does not have an alternative candidate to put forward. The high indicators of potential electoral support for Vladimir Putin in 2018 are reinforced by the fact that his supporters have no preferences for an alternative candidate. At present there are no politicians who are in a position to challenge Vladimir Putin, or even replace him as a second choice.

Reference:

When analyzing and evaluating the data of sociological studies conducted by Romir, VTsIOM and FOM, one should take into account that about 10% of the participants of the survey said they would not vote in the elections, and 2% said they would deliberately deface the ballot paper. This will lead to an adjustment of the final results and a proportional increase in the votes cast for any given candidate. It should also be noted that almost a fifth of those who were undecided when polled, are likely to come out in support of Putin. This could lead to a final result of around 70-75% of the populace voting for him. All the figures in the research data below are based on the total number of respondents - without adjustment for those who do not intend to vote, are undecided, found it difficult to answer, or declared their intention to deface the ballot paper. All in all, the latter group, make up 23%, according to research by Romir.



The socio-demographic qualities of the "Putin majority"

The following qualities are intrinsic to those within the Putin majority:

The Putin Majority is represented in all age groups of the populace. The number of Putin supporters among young people (respondents aged 18-24) is of particular interest. According to Romir, 65% of young people aged 18-23 (who are voting for the first time) are intending to vote for Putin. This is the highest index of electoral support and exceeds all other age categories. It should be noted that both here, and in further data provided below, amendments should be made for those respondents who said they did not intend to vote or who say they will deface the ballot paper, and most importantly for those who were not sure who they would vote for on the day of the survey and can be classified as "undecided". A significant number of these people will make a decision only on the day of the vote or at the polling station and they are likely to support the incumbent president of the Russian Federation.

According to Romir, 64% of young people in the 24-34 year age group are planning to vote for Putin, 61% of the 35-44 year age group, 56% for those aged 45-59, and 62% for those aged 60 years and over. (These figures do not take into account those who say they do not plan to take part in the elections and are not intending to vote for any of the potential candidates, so the actual figures following the election will be higher).

However, the data obtained from research carried out by VTsIOM and FOM indicates that there is greater support for Vladimir Putin among the most senior age group (60 years and older). Research carried out by VTsIOM indicates that 80% of respondents are intending to vote for the current president of the Russian Federation in this age category. While research by FOM, shows a support level for Vladimir Putin of 74% in the 60 years and older age group.

Studies show that the level of education as a whole does not affect the degree of support for the incumbent head of state, which is between 58-63%.

The Putin majority is relatively evenly distributed across all types of populated areas of the Russian Federation. A significant number of supporters of Vladimir Putin live in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities with a population of over one million people. According to Romir, 64% of respondents in these cities support the Putin majority. A poll conducted by



VTsIOM shows that 69% of people in Moscow and St Petersburg and 66% of people in cities with a population of over one million people support the incumbent president.

In cities with a population of 500 thousand to one million people, the level of electoral support for the current president of the Russian Federation according to Romir is 59%. According to polls by VTsIOM, 60% of people in cities with a population of 500 - 950 thousand people, intend to vote for Putin. VTsIOM research data indicates that 66% of those polled in cities with a population of 100-500 thousand people, support the Russian president. According to Romir, 62% of those living in cities with a population of less than 100 thousand people intend to vote for Putin, as do 63% of respondents living in rural areas. Polls carried out by VTsIOM show that 60% of people living in cities with a population of 50-100 thousand people and 65% of those in rural areas support Putin. (This is also true for statistics on those who are undecided.)

According to a study by FOM study, the highest level of electoral support for Vladimir Putin is in rural areas (67%), in cities with a population of 250 thousand to one million people (62%), in urban-type settlements and cities with a population of less than 50 thousand (59%).

Political preferences of the Putin majority

Putin's popularity has increased among those who supported other politicians back in 2012. According to research by Romir, 6% of respondents who intend to vote for the incumbent president of the Russian Federation in the upcoming elections, voted for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the LDPR in 2012. 4% voted for Gennady Zyuganov the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, 11% for Sergey Mironov leader of "A Fair Russia" (SR) and 20% for businessman Mikhail Prokhorov. This explains in part the relative lack of popular support for these long established contenders in the presidential race which is now evident from recent surveys: 9-11% intend to vote for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, 3-6% for Zyuganov, around 2% for Mironov and around 1% for Grigory Yavlinsky of the Yabloko Party. It should however be noted that these indicators might change during the election campaign due to ongoing news and party political campaigns.

Vladimir Putin also gained popularity among people who previously did not vote in the presidential elections. According to VTsIOM, 24% of those who



intend to vote for the incumbent head of state did not vote in the presidential election in 2012. This leads us to conclude that the Putin majority is growing and includes those did not participate in election campaigns during previous electoral cycles.

Base and peripheral support within the Putin majority

According to research carried out by Romir, base electoral support of Vladimir Putin now stands at about 77% among the Russian people. This figure is based on polls where the respondent ticked the box for either 'yes, definitely' or 'yes, probably' when asked if they would call themselves a supporter of Vladimir Putin.

35% of respondents answered 'yes, definitely.' They are mostly women (37%) within the 35-44 age group (38%), 45-59 age group (36%) or 60 and over age group (43%) with an average and below average education (42%) or higher education (34%). They live mainly in cities with a population of over one million people (44%), in cities with a population of less than 100 thousand people (35%) or in rural areas (38%).

42% of the respondents answered 'yes, probably.' In this category, a virtually equal number of men (43%) and women (42%) are represented within the 18-23 age group (42%), 24-34 age group (47%), 35-44 age group (42%) and 45-59 age group (42%). They tend to have secondary special (44%) or higher (44%) education. Representatives of this category live mainly in cities with a population of 500 thousand - one million people (47%), 250-500 thousand people (49%) and 100-250 thousand people (50%).

It is important to define the peripheral margin of the Putin Majority within the framework of this research. This includes those people (20%) who, when asked if they were a supporter of Putin, answered: 'in some ways I am and in some ways I am not.'

Both men (21%) and women (19%) are almost equally represented in this peripheral margin. They belong mainly to the 18-23 (24%) and 24-34 year (23%) age groups. They tend to have secondary special education (21%) and higher education (21%). Representatives of the periphery of the Putin majority



live mainly in cities with a population of 500 thousand - one million people (24%) and 250-500 thousand people (23%).

A Romir poll conducted on what personal qualities are most appealing to representatives of the Putin majority, highlight the following attributes: intelligence, acuity, competence (61%) leadership qualities, authority, prestige, charisma (45%), determination, purposefulness (42 %), confidence (39%), efficiency (36%), political experience (36%). It is these qualities, which have won so much electoral support for the Russian president. In many ways, these aspects of his character (such as intelligence, acuity, competence, efficiency, foresight, leadership qualities and prestige are – according to data from Romir – what constitutes the political image of Vladimir Putin in the eyes of his supporters.

The reunification of the Crimea and Sevastopol with Russia remains one of the most significant events to those in the Putin majority when ranked among his most important achievements and successes. 64% of respondents who took part in a Romir poll were of this opinion. Similarly, a VTsIOM poll showed that 65% of Putin supporters said they were ‘definitely in favour’ of the reunification of the Crimea and Sevastopol with Russia.

Other important achievements by Vladimir Putin were seen by his supporters to be in the arena of foreign and defense policies. Thus, according to Romir, 40% of respondents who were asked to rate the achievements of the incumbent head of state, singled out his effective foreign policy and strengthening of the Russian Federation’s authority in the global arena. For 38%, the key success in Putin's presidency has been the increase in the army's fighting capacity. And for 34% it was his appropriate reaction to the sanctions imposed by Western countries against Russia.

Electoral character of the Putin majority

The majority of representatives of the Putin majority said that they supported the United Russia (EP) Party. Romir polls show that when asked ‘what Party did you vote for in the elections to the State Duma in September 2016?’ 64% of Putin supporters, said that they voted for EP A survey conducted by FOM found that 61% of supporters of the incumbent president of the Russian Federation voted for the EP in the elections to the State Duma in 2016. It



should be noted that about 21% (Romir), 23% (VTsIOM) and 24% (FOM) of the representatives of the Putin majority stated that they did not vote in the election of deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation.

There are also those within the Putin majority, who supported candidates from other political parties (ie not from United Russia). According to VTsIOM, 6% of people within the Putin majority supported "A Fair Russia", 5% the LDPR and 5% the Communist Party.

If Vladimir Putin does not stand in the upcoming presidential election, the Putin majority has no alternative candidate. A poll by Romir asked the question: 'If Vladimir Putin did not stand as a candidate in next Sunday's presidential elections, who would you vote for instead?' 39% of the respondents found it difficult to answer, 17% said they would simply not vote, and another 12% said they would deface the ballot paper or take the ballot paper away as a protest.

Research by VTsIOM shows a similar picture. In answer to the question 'If Vladimir Putin did not stand as a candidate in the presidential elections, for whom would you vote instead?' 34% of respondents found it difficult to answer. Another 18% chose the answer: "I would not take part in the elections". The intention to come to the polling booth but then deface the ballot paper was expressed by 4% of the respondents.

Romir polled supporters of the incumbent head of state, who would vote for another candidate if Putin were not to stand: 9% of respondents spoke in favor of the leader of the LDPR, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, 6% for the leader of the Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov and 4% would vote for the leader of A Fair Russia, Sergei Mironov. Other candidates such as Alexei Kudrin, Irina Khakamada and Mikhail Prokhorov would garner 2% of the vote each as possible second choice candidates. In a similar poll, VTsIOM showed that of those who would still vote if Putin was not stand as a candidate, 17% would support Zhirinovskiy, 10% would be for Zyuganov, and 7% - for Mironov.

The ideological priorities and the values of the Putin majority.

The Putin's majority is a supra-party electoral phenomenon built around the values and ideologies shared by most Russian citizens.

Representatives of the Putin majority are conservative in approach and, according to research by VTsIOM, they are in favour of the following concepts:



- Russian politics should be focused on strengthening the state and developing a progressive way of Russian life. (81%)
- Russia needs stability, and the people need a quiet life (82%)
- The Putin majority approve spending on strengthening the defense capacity of Russia (69%)
- The state should take care of low-income and vulnerable population groups (83%)
- Russia should be a great power with powerful armed forces and influence in global politics. (55%)
- Human rights and freedoms should be assured in every area of life. (60%)
- There should be social justice in the equality of all before the law (47%)
- The main concern of the state should be to ensure the prosperity and dignity of its people. (70%)

Which of the following values is most important to you? (Romir data)	
Freedom	13%
Security	36%
Both are equally important	51%
Interests of the individual	22%
Interests of the state as a whole	22%
Both are equally important	56%
Continued stability	44%
Implementation of reforms	14%



Both are equally important	43%
Equality for all	31%
Free competition	25%
Both are equally important	44%

According to Romir, the most important priorities for the Putin majority are: family, children, health and material wellbeing. For young supporters of Vladimir Putin priorities such as education, career, friendship and human relations are no less relevant.

Voters aged 35 to 59 tend to focus on caring for children and prosperity, and those who are older focus on issues related to health and respecting historical achievements. Residents of large cities are more likely to be concerned with material well being, while those in rural areas are more concerned with health care.

A survey by VTsIOM showed similar life values.

According to research by FOM, the main priorities of Putin's supporters are mutual understanding and good relationships within the family unit, material wellbeing and comfort, and also respect for others.

When asked (by Romir) about their individual perspectives on life over the next 3-5 years, , respondents cited health (65%), increased income (60%), ensuring comfortable surroundings (36%), education of children (33%) , strengthening Russia's position in the world (24%) and less corruption (15%).

What is important for you over the next 3-5 years? (Romir data)	
Health	65%
Increase in/a raise in income	60%
Comfortable surroundings	36%



Education of children	33%
Strengthening Russia's position in the world	24%
Less corruption	15%
Increase of citizens' freedoms and opportunities	5%

Methods of political communication by the Putin majority

Television is the main source of information for Putin's supporters. According to research by Romir, 77% of respondents who intend to vote for the incumbent president of Russia, rely on federal television as their main source of information concerning events in the country and the world at large. The Putin majority also watch regional and local television programs (49%), read news sites on the Internet (37%), access news aggregators and search engines (32%), use social networks and the blogosphere (30%), read federal print media (23%), glean information from friends and acquaintances (21%), read regional and local newspapers (19%) and listen to all-Russian radio stations (14%) and local radio stations (8%).

FOM studies show that 89% of Vladimir Putin's supporters consider television to be the main source of information. 39% prefer internet news sites, 27% social networks, forums and blogs, and 23% - print newspapers and magazines.

The internet and the Putin majority

Supporters of Vladimir Putin use Russian social media sites. According to research by Romir, their preferences when it comes to social media were as follows: 74% of the respondents used VKontakte, 55% were on Odnoklassniki, 28% on Facebook, 28% on Instagram and 14% on Moi Mir.

According to Romir, VKontakte is primarily used by men as a source of information (81%), aged 18-23 (90%), 24-34 (83%), 35-44 (65%) and 45 -59 years (54%) with an average and below average education (81%), or higher (77%) education. They live in cities with a population of 250-500 thousand people (77%), 500 thousand - one million people (79%) and more than one million people (82%).



The Odnoklassniki network is most popular among women (60%) aged 35-44 (68%), 45-59 (79%), 60 years and older (77%) with a secondary special (60%), or Higher education (59%). Users of Odnoklassniki as a source of information about events in the country and the world, live predominantly in rural areas (69%), cities with a population of less than 100 thousand people (58%), 100-250 thousand people (63%) and 250-500 Thousand people (58%).

Facebook is preferred mainly among men (33%) aged 18-23 (30%) and 24-34 years (34%) with an average and below average (33%) or higher (35%) education. They live in cities with a population of 250-500 thousand people (30%) and more than one million people (40%).

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study conducted by the Civil Society Development Foundation in April 2017, which analyzed user activity of the Putin majority on social media and the blogosphere:

The concept of a confrontation between the "Internet Party" and the "Television Party" is no longer relevant

Five or six years ago it was predicted that television viewers would increasingly turn to the fundamentally different information source of the Internet which would, in turn bring about a change in political preferences, but this presumption turned out to be completely wrong. On the contrary, in the last two years, there has been a steady trend towards the symbiotic use of both television and the Internet. Internet networks for example now show television content (while content from the internet has traditionally been shown on television).

The TV program "News of the Week" (Vesti Nedyeli), presented by Dmitry Kiselyov is regularly one of the most viewed videos on Russian Youtube. And this trend is equally evident when it comes to non-political programmes on television. Broadcasts of the "Let Them Speak" (Pust Govoryat) programme, and entertainment shows like "The Voice" are always the subject of heated discussions on the largest Russian social media sites.



Thus, more conservative television viewers who have started using the internet and social media platforms, have found it is possible to continue watching the media channel they are used to, instead of referring exclusively to internet based sources of information.

Overall decrease in internet activity by the Putin majority

The past two years has seen a consistent decline in the levels of conflicting views surrounding political events. After a sharp upsurge of interest in 2014, when events in the Crimea and Ukraine led to a general escalation of internet activity by the previously - relatively silent - Putin majority, the country saw a period of stabilization. News items related to the events in Syria and the Donbass during this period did lead to a spike in interest among internet users in localized areas, but users of the Russian internet in general have become less concerned with politics.

The President as a focal point

Over the past two years, no other political force has approached the popularity of the Putin majority, nor has any political figure come even remotely close to the firm support that is enjoyed by the President. Moreover, it should also be stated unequivocally, that none of the major political parties or authoritative leaders have made consistent attempts to win over the Putin majority segment of internet users of Internet users.

Other representatives of the Putin majority

Two representatives of the foreign policy bloc - Sergei Shoygu (the Russian defence minister) and Sergei Lavrov (the Russian foreign minister) have become the most popular representatives of the Putin majority. This can be explained by the longstanding absorption of Russians in the country's military and diplomatic successes, as well as the deep conviction in society that strategic decisions in these two areas are made personally by Vladimir Putin himself.

On the other hand, representatives of the economic bloc are considered by the Putin majority to be 'liberals' – and are therefore almost seen as being opponents of the President.



Resistance to a negative outlook

The in depth coverage of events in the Donbass and in Syria by the federal media, fueled an increased interest in these two political arenas by the Putin majority - despite the obvious lack of newsworthy events. However, the unresolved issues of the Donbass conflict and the fight against ISIS along with related hostile reporting, has not caused any particular unease within this segment of the Internet community and has not caused people to shift from a loyal position over to an opposition one. Any positive changes in the situation are met with approval, while news of a worsening conflict are, if anything, ignored. It therefore seems that the prediction by experts that the popularity of conservative, opposition leaders would grow, has not come true.

What is very evident however, is that ongoing support of the Putin majority, is, if anything, being shored up by the situation surrounding the introduction of sanctions against Russia and Russia's reciprocal sanctions. Contrary to what the Western public and the Russian opposition believe, this has not been an adverse issue for the Putin majority. It was mostly the more affluent segment of the population of large cities (the so called upper-middle class) which, was affected by the temporary shortage of consumer goods. The average Russian was not affected by these shortages but faced instead, the problem of prices being hiked on mainly imported goods. In general, the sanctions had the opposite effect – a rallying around the state leader. In fact a news campaign aimed at highlighting the importance of a policy to substitute imported goods with domestic ones for the development of Russia's industry and agriculture, was, on the whole, successful. Nowadays, it is generally thought among loyalists that the sanctions were actually a blessing for the country, not a blow.

Localization of the domestic agenda

As noted above, foreign policy events are of particular interest to representatives of the Putin majority, but it would be a mistake to say that they completely ignore domestic policy.

The average Russian is fairly indifferent to the federal level issues, which engage journalists and leading observers. In fact, the general public has little interest in national socio-economic policies and virtually no interest in local government and Party politics.



The Putin majority category of internet users is far more concerned about what is happening on a city and regional level. Political activism on a regional level is considerably more dynamic and is far from being oppositional in character when it comes to local government. Activists tend to coordinate their projects by posting on city or regional social networking groups, WhatsApp groups or forums. It is important to note that adverse events on a regional level usually lead to public criticism of local authorities - which does not in any way reflect on support for the President.

