

Opposition Demands Vote for Moscow Mayor

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The  Moscow Times

Hundreds of opposition supporters rallied Saturday to demand the return of Moscow mayoral elections as pressure mounted for Mayor Yury Luzhkov to resign.

"We haven't seen so many out [at a rally] in a long time," Vladimir Ryzhkov, a former State Duma deputy who is now an opposition leader, told the crowd. "Apparently we have found an issue that really worries Muscovites. The ground is shaking under Luzhkov."

Ryzhkov said it was a "coincidence" that the rally, in Bolotnaya Ploshchad across the river from the Kremlin, was staged amid an anti-Luzhkov campaign on state-controlled media, Radio Liberty reported.

Police put the turnout at about 450 people, RIA-Novosti reported. Radio Liberty said more than 1,000 attended.

Luzhkov was elected by popular vote three times before the Kremlin abolished direct elections for regional heads in 2004.

"We have been deprived of any influence in the process. We are ruled by a mayor who has been in office for more than 18 years," organizers of Saturday's rally said in a statement. "It's high time for him to retire."

Meanwhile, Moscow residents' trust in Luzhkov has plummeted to 20 percent from 52 percent in January 1999, the independent Levada Center pollster said Friday.

Fifty-four percent distrust the mayor, up from 32 percent, while the remainder of respondents did not have an opinion, according to the poll of 1,600 people conducted Sept. 17 to 21.

Fifteen percent of respondents said Luzhkov would step down after the media attacks, while 40 percent said he would remain mayor for another 12 to 18 months and 22 percent said he would be in City Hall "for a long time to come."

The poll had a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.

(Reuters, Bloomberg, MT)

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