

The Wizard of Russia Has Been Exposed

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Many are calling the booing incident against Vladimir Putin last Saturday during the Monson-Emelianenko mixed martial arts match a watershed mark in Putin's inevitable demise.

The "silent majority," it would seem, has finally spoken up. They were not die-hard liberals from Parnas or The Other Russia, mind you. Nor were they radical leftists from Rot Front. What is most surprising and telling is that they were from the country's grassroots — blue-collar martial arts fans who were once, in large part, a strong Putin constituency. Even they have had enough of Putin's stagnation poorly disguised as "stability," managed and sovereign democracy and his cheap PR stunts.

Many called this a sensation. For once we saw a different Putin — dismayed, confused and cut down to size. After 12 years of pulling the PR levers and blowing a lot of smoke, the "Wizard of Russia" was finally exposed by mixed martial arts fans, who — like Toto in the final scene of "The Wizard of Oz" — pulled back Putin's curtain, revealing a meek, ordinary man.

In and of itself, one booing incident does not make a revolution, of course. But it is part of a

larger anti-Putin trend that has been building since Sept. 24, when Putin smugly announced at the United Russia convention that he wants to switch places with President Dmitry Medvedev.

This trend includes a blistering [speech](#) last Friday during a State Duma session by senior Just Russia Deputy Gennady Gudkov, who railed against United Russia's election fraud. For once under Putin's rule, the Duma had become a place for discussion — at least for five minutes while Gudkov spoke. Gudkov's diatribe was particularly significant given his 10-year siloviki background as a former KGB colonel.

During an interview on Ekho Moskvyy on Monday, Gudkov said: "I want to warn the authorities to refrain from [election] falsification. ... They still have time to stop this madness. If they don't, the people will take their protests to the streets as we have seen all over the world. ... Look at Egypt and Libya." This is how it could end in Russia as well, Gudkov warned.

Indeed, this anti-Putin trend could lead to a "perfect storm" that could hit Russia after the Duma elections. As Gudkov warns, this storm could take the form of mass protests and unrest if United Russia claims on Dec. 5 that it won 60 percent or more of the vote when, in reality, its ratings are as low as 20 percent in many regions, including Moscow, according to Ilya Barabanov's Nov. 7 article in The New Times.

For decades, the Kremlin has staged elections according to Josef Stalin's principle, "What matters is not how the people vote, but who is counting the votes." But as post-Soviet history has shown — from the Color Revolutions to the Arab Spring — autocrats are having a lot more difficulty getting away with these tricks.

The world's top "wizards" have been exposed and dethroned. Putin should take note.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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