

YouTube Viewers Love Imaginary Putin Trial

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A fake news report placing Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in the dock has become an online hit, getting nearly 3 million views in just three days.

The digitally altered clip posted on YouTube this week used news footage of the 2010 trial of former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky to put Putin on trial instead of the businessman.

The prosecution of Khodorkovsky, which began with his arrest in 2003, is widely seen as retaliation for challenging Putin's power.

Putin, who was Russia's president from 2000 to 2008, is facing an outburst of public discontent as he runs for a third term in a March 4 presidential election he is widely expected to win.

The video, called "The Arrest of Vladimir Putin," shows him in the courtroom, locked inside the cage where defendants in Russia are typically held during their trials. A female voice is heard "reporting" that Putin has been charged with corruption and terrorism.

The judge who convicted Khodorkovsky asks the defendant for his name and nationality, and the tape is changed so that Putin, not Khodorkovsky, responds. The audio was taken from television footage of Putin participating in the 2010 census.

The imagined arrest refers to opposition leaders' allegations that Putin and his friends have illegally amassed vast fortunes since he came to power.

Putin's supporters also have made creative use of other video. A series of videos portraying a future "Russia Without Putin" use news montages of food lines, homeless people, street rioting and military conflict to warn of the chaos and carnage that could engulf Russia if Putin were not in charge.

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