

Muscovites Against New Protest Law, Poll Says

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Most Muscovites disapprove of new rules hiking protest fines and think authorities are afraid of a rise in protest activity, a poll released Wednesday showed.

In response to questions from Levada Center pollsters in Moscow, 28 percent of respondents said they strongly disapproved of the new protest rules, while 39 percent broadly disapproved, Kommersant reported.

Sixty-eight percent explained the stiffer fines by authorities' fear of a surge in protest activity, while 21 percent believed that the government was concerned with maintaining law and order.

President Vladimir Putin signed the controversial amendments into law on June 8, a few days before the opposition March of Millions protest.

Fines can now stretch to 300,000 rubles (\$9,275) for participants and 1 million rubles for organizers of unauthorized or illegal protests.

In the same survey, sociologists found that only 3 percent of Moscow residents felt seriously inconvenienced by recent protests.

Sixty-four percent of respondents saw no problems with holding protests in the city center, including on one of the city's main squares, and 15 percent agreed that obstacles that prevent protests from being held in the heart of the city were "thought up by authorities."

Levada Center deputy director Alexei Grazhdankin told Kommersant that the findings demonstrate that Muscovites expect city authorities to respect their choices.

"Muscovites are involved in politics to a large extent, they have something to defend. These are people who are largely affluent, have a future. They expect authorities to respect them," Grazhdankin said.

Kommersant did not report the margin of error or number of respondents in the Levada Center poll.

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