

# Ahead of Trial, Navalny Has Jail Bag Packed

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Leaflets advertising a protest in support of Navalny lying on a table at his headquarters in Kirov on Tuesday. **Maxim Shemetov**

KIROV — Opposition leader Alexei Navalny is so sure President Vladimir Putin wants him convicted in a trial starting on Wednesday that he has already packed a jail bag with sneakers, jogging pants and slippers.

He expects he will also need shoes without laces under legal procedures if, or when, he is taken into custody after the trial in the freshly spruced-up Leninsky Court in the provincial city of Kirov, 900 kilometers northeast of Moscow.

The anti-corruption blogger, 36, is the most prominent opposition leader to be tried since anti-Putin protests began 16 months ago. He could be jailed for 10 years if convicted of stealing 16 million rubles (\$510,000) from a timber firm he was advising in 2009 while working for Kirov's liberal governor.

Supporters portray the trial in Kirov — a drab city that is dominated by square and grey Soviet-era buildings and whose streets are covered with mud after the spring thaw — as the culmination of a clampdown on dissent by Putin since he returned to the presidency last May after four years as prime minister.

"I think it's clear to any objective observer that I'm not guilty," Navalny said in his Moscow office before heading to Kirov. But he added: "I am absolutely certain that it will end in a conviction for me."

Navalny accuses Putin of orchestrating the trial and says the best he can expect is a suspended sentence which would keep him out of elections — he hinted this month that he might like one day to be Russia's president.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, declined comment but has denied that the president uses the courts for political ends. Distancing Putin from the case, he says the Kremlin leader will not be following the trial.

"If there is no proof, he will be acquitted," said Konstantin Zaitsev, the senior official at the court, denying that it had come under pressure to deliver a predetermined verdict.

Navalny's conviction appears all but certain. More than 99 percent of Russian trials end with a guilty verdict, according to Vadim Volkov and Kirill Titaev of the European University at St. Petersburg.

The presiding judge, Sergei Blinov, has issued 130 guilty verdicts and no acquittals in the last two years, according to the pro-Navalny magazine *The New Times*. Blinov is not holding any preliminary hearings, which Navalny's lawyers say is illegal. The only intrigue in the trial, Navalny says, will be whether he is jailed or given a suspended sentence to bar him from running for office.

Navalny has strong backing among the middle class and urban youth in Moscow who flocked to the anti-Putin rallies he helped organize in Moscow last year.

But his support base is weaker outside big cities, and Putin sees little political risk in making an example of Navalny to discourage other dissenters. Conservative voters, Putin's traditional support base, could welcome a jail sentence after opposing protests that had little resonance in the provinces.

"I trust the courts. If they're putting him on trial, he's apparently guilty," pensioner Lyubov Chuprakova said in Kirov, named after a communist whose 1934 assassination was used by dictator Josef Stalin as a pretext for mass purges.

Another pensioner, Nikolai Makarov, said: "I don't know what he has done exactly, but those court cases don't just get opened over nothing."

Navalny, who listed the contents of his jail bag in an article he wrote for a Russian magazine, says the case against him is politically motivated, noting that it had been dropped a year ago but reopened before he was charged in July.

He said he believed the intention was to intimidate, but he carried on with his opposition work

and the last straw may have been when he organized a rally outside the headquarters of the Soviet KGB's successor agency in Moscow.

The anti-Putin protests have faded, and parliament has passed a series of laws that opponents say are intended to stifle the opposition, such as increasing fines for protesters.

But opposition activists plan to protest in support of Navalny in Moscow and Kirov on Wednesday. Some will travel to Kirov to support him.

Navalny says he has increasingly been thinking about the fate of jailed former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was arrested in 2003 and convicted of fraud and tax evasion in 2005.

Once Russia's richest man, Khodorkovsky saw his business empire dismantled and sold off, much of it to allies of Putin, after falling out of favor with the president.

"My situation really isn't the saddest one," he said. "Whether it'll be a conditional or a prison sentence, I don't know. They'll have a look at how the trial is going and they'll decide."

His wife Yulia, with whom he has a son, aged five, and a daughter, aged 11, told independent Dozhd television that she expects it will probably end in conviction.

"I will wait for him, will try to help so that he understands we are all waiting for him," she said.

*Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.*

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