

Less Than 20% of Russians Think Sochi Games Are a Putin PR Ploy, Poll Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Putin at a ceremony to greet the Russian Olympic Committee delegation.

Less than a fifth of Russians think that the Winter Olympics in Sochi are being used to enhance President Vladimir Putin's image and nearly half think corruption and inefficiency caused construction costs at the Games to soar, a poll published Wednesday indicates.

Thirty-four percent of respondents attributed high costs to the greed and carelessness of construction companies, according to Levada Center, which conducted the poll. Nineteen percent said that inadequate project management by the government was to blame, while 14 percent said that low quality work by construction companies was to blame. Those surveyed were allowed to give more than one answer.

Opposition politician Alexei Navalny last week published a report that put the overall cost of the Games at 1.5 trillion rubles (\$44 billion), 96 percent of which came from public sources. He said that noncompetitive tenders for construction projects allowed Putin-allies to steal

\$15 billion from the state.

Putin and ministers involved in organizing the Games said the total cost of the event was 214 billion rubles, and that only 100 billion was taken from the state budget.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents said they don't expect the businessmen and officials purportedly guilty of corruption to be prosecuted and punished after the Games.

When asked about the reasons behind the decision to put Sochi forward as the host city, 17 percent said that it was aimed at improving the image of Putin and the rest of Russia's politicians. Fifteen percent said that the objective was to develop the Black Sea resort and attract more tourists.

A number of Western leaders will not be present at the opening ceremony of the Games on Friday, including U.S. President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron, and 29 percent of Russians think the no-shows can be explained by a dislike of Russia's current leadership. Eleven percent said leaders decided to shun the curtain raiser in response to repressive laws passed in Russia in recent times, for example, the ban on the dissemination of "gay propaganda" to minors that has led to calls to boycott the Games by gay rights activists and celebrities alike.

Obama and Cameron said they were unable to attend because of schedule clashes.

Alexei Grazhdankin, deputy director of the independent Levada Center pollster, said the results indicate that Russians believe that Olympic construction can't have been completed without graft.

Fifty-three percent said that hosting the Games is worthwhile, but 26 percent disagreed.

The vast majority of respondents — 85 percent — said it is important for the Russian team to finish in the top five on the medal table. Only 14 percent expect the team to finish in first place.

The poll was carried out at the end of January among 1,603 respondents across 45 regions. The margin of error did not exceed 3.4 percent.

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