

Anti-Putin Rally in Moscow Met With Protest and Sympathy

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Members of the Solidarity democratic opposition movement this weekend gathered in central Moscow.

Opposition activists rallying in Moscow on Saturday drew an onslaught from Kremlin supporters but also, according to protesters, sympathy from passersby in what they say is a sign that public sentiment might be changing in their favor.

Members of the Solidarity democratic opposition movement this weekend gathered in central Moscow holding up signs denouncing Vladimir Putin's policies in Ukraine and supporting the suspects in the so-called Bolotnoye case, according to a [video](#) posted on YouTube by opposition news portal Grani.ru.

Nearly 30 of those who attended an anti-Kremlin rally in 2012 — held on the eve of Vladimir Putin's inauguration for a third term as president — were charged with participating in what the authorities have described as "mass riots."

Critics say that the Bolotnoye case formed part of a wider crackdown on Kremlin opponents and that the skirmishes were stoked by police aggression.

Saturday's rally was challenged by about 20 activists from a rival, pro-Kremlin camp who gathered nearby and accosted the protesters, tearing down some of the signs, Grani.ru reported.

But when Kremlin supporters began chanting "Putin" in a show of allegiance, opposition demonstrators responded by completing the slogan with a chant that has been popularized by Ukrainian soccer fans and that adds a crude expletive to the president's name.

The video shows protesters accusing Putin of "having blood on his hands," and being a "war criminal."

One of the signs held by protesters featured a caricature of Putin looking in the mirror at the image of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

Another sign referred to the widespread support for the president in opinion polls to say: "80 percent of Russians support Pu[utin]. Why is Russia following the lead of a crazy dork?"

No signs of police interference could be seen in the video, and no arrests of the opposition activists were reported. Instead, police have detained one of the pro-Kremlin activists, identified as member of the National Liberation movement Gosha Tarasevich, for allegedly attacking opposition demonstrators, Grani.ru reported.

Changing Mood

One of the opposition protesters featured in the video said that while the group's regular rallies in the capital used to be met with almost "universal aggression" from passersby, lately the "mood has changed."

"An increasing number of people have been coming up to us, saying they support us," the activist said.

The same video, however, shows not everyone is keen to join in on the anti-Kremlin sentiment, with spectators accusing the protesters of staging "a Muppet show," and being "traitors."

Responding to one woman's "[German Chancellor] Angela Merkel said it's impossible to talk to [Putin]," a bystander cynically responds: "Who is Angela Merkel?! She's no one."

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