

Opposition Rallies in Moscow to Demand Fair Elections (Video)

September 20, 2015



Police said about 4,000 people attended the rally, while its organizers put the turnout at twice that number.

Thousands of people rallied on the streets of Moscow on Sunday to demand fair elections and challenge Vladimir Putin's 15-year rule, in the first significant opposition protest in the capital for months.

The gathering was restricted by authorities to a district of southern Moscow. Police said that 4,000 people had taken part, while the organizers of the rally said twice as many as that had attended, Interfax reported.

"Putin is a bureaucrat, not the tsar," one poster said. Opposition leaders, including anti-Kremlin figurehead Alexei Navalny, said they were protesting against what they called Putin's "lifelong" rule.

"Russia will be free!" opposition activist Ilya Yashin told the rally. "We will not depart from

the country and leave it to the mercy of ‘crooks and thieves,’” he said, referring to a phrase coined by Navalny to describe Russia’s ruling party.

The turnout was a far cry from the 100,000 who marched in December 2011 in anger at widely reported violations of a parliamentary election.

Thousands of Muscovites marched through the city in March this year in memory of slain Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov, who was shot dead on a bridge in central Moscow in February.

At Sunday’s rally there were posters related to the killing of Nemtsov and a general crackdown on political dissent.

Putin has now been Russia’s dominant leader since 2000, when ailing President Boris Yeltsin chose him as his successor. Earlier this month, the ruling United Russia party swept regional elections.

Russia will hold a presidential vote in 2018. Putin, who is eligible to run for the six-year presidency again, has not yet said if he will be a candidate.

Material from The Moscow Times was included in this report.

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