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Navalny's Support Base Grows as Recognition Spreads Across Russia

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Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny speaks to the media in his campaign office in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk. **Ilnar Salakhiev / AP**

The number of Russians supporting opposition politician Alexei Navalny has grown as the leader has become more widely recognized outside of Moscow, a report by independent pollster the Levada Center has revealed.

While the increased exposure has led to a statistical drop in the number of people willing to support the opposition leader, it means that Navalny will see more votes in Russia's 2018 presidential elections .

While 33 percent of people who knew Navalny were prepared to vote for him in 2011, just 6 percent of respondents recognized his name. In 2017, some 47 percent of respondents recognized the opposition leader. From this larger group, 10 percent said that they would back Navalny at the polls.

Many Russians remain indifferent towards Navalny: some 35 percent of those quizzed by

Levada said that they were neutral toward him, while 23 percent said that "they had nothing good to say."

Another 3 percent said that they respected the activist, with 4 percent feeling empathy towards him. Just 9 percent said that they had "nothing bad to say about Navalny," down from 17 percent in 2011.

One in ten respondents said that they felt hostility towards the activist, while another 10 percent said that Navalny irritated them.

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Navalny's election campaign was jeopardized earlier this month when a Russian court found him guilty of embezzlement and handed him a five-year suspended sentence.

Under Russian law, the conviction bars him from running for public office.

A number of rights groups and the European Union have criticized proceedings saying the trial and sentencing was politically-motivated.

Navalny first stood trial on charges of embezzlement in 2013 when he was also found guilty.

The Russian Supreme Court overturned the conviction in November 2016 under pressure from the European Court of Human Rights but a retrial was swiftly ordered.

The survey was carried out between Feb. 17 and Feb. 20 among 1,600 people in 137 settlements of Russia.

CORRECTION: This article has been edited to clarify that the larger number of people were surveyed on whether they would support Navalny in the Levada Center's 2017 poll . The Moscow Times would like to apologize for any confusion caused.

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