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Navalny Supporters Arrested at Campaign Event in Southern Russia

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Alexei Navalny in Samara (Yulia Zhivodyorova / navalny.com)

Police in Samara released eight supporters of opposition leader Alexei Navalny on Sunday morning after they were detained ahead of a campaign rally in the southern Russian city.

Navalny's supporters were detained while they were preparing for the rally in front of Kirov Square. Local authorities had argued that the rally could not go ahead because a belly dance festival was already scheduled at the location, the Interfax news agency reported.

Navalny has been holding campaign rallies across Russia as part of his bid for the presidency in March 2018, despite being legally barred from participating due to fraud charges that his supporters say are politically motivated.

Related article: Alexei Navalny Detained on His Way to Nizhny Novgorod Rally

"After we complained about the violation of the three-hour detention period, all [of the activists] were released," Navalny's local campaign coordinator Yekaterina Gerasimova was cited as saying by Interfax.

An estimated 6,000 people attended the rally on Sunday, according to the Kommersant business daily.

In a blog post, Navalny wrote that officials had blared music from speakers to drown out the rally.

"I suppose that half of the audience did not hear anything at all because of the cheerful Eastern music that the [local] administration turned on (they deliberately brought in speakers for the second half)," he wrote.

"But it was still one of the best rallies of the election campaign."

Navalny's chief of staff Leonid Volkov wrote on Friday that he had been sentenced to 30 days in prison for organizing an unsanctioned rally in Nizhny Novgorod in September.

"That's how badly they're afraid of us," he wrote on his Twitter account.

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