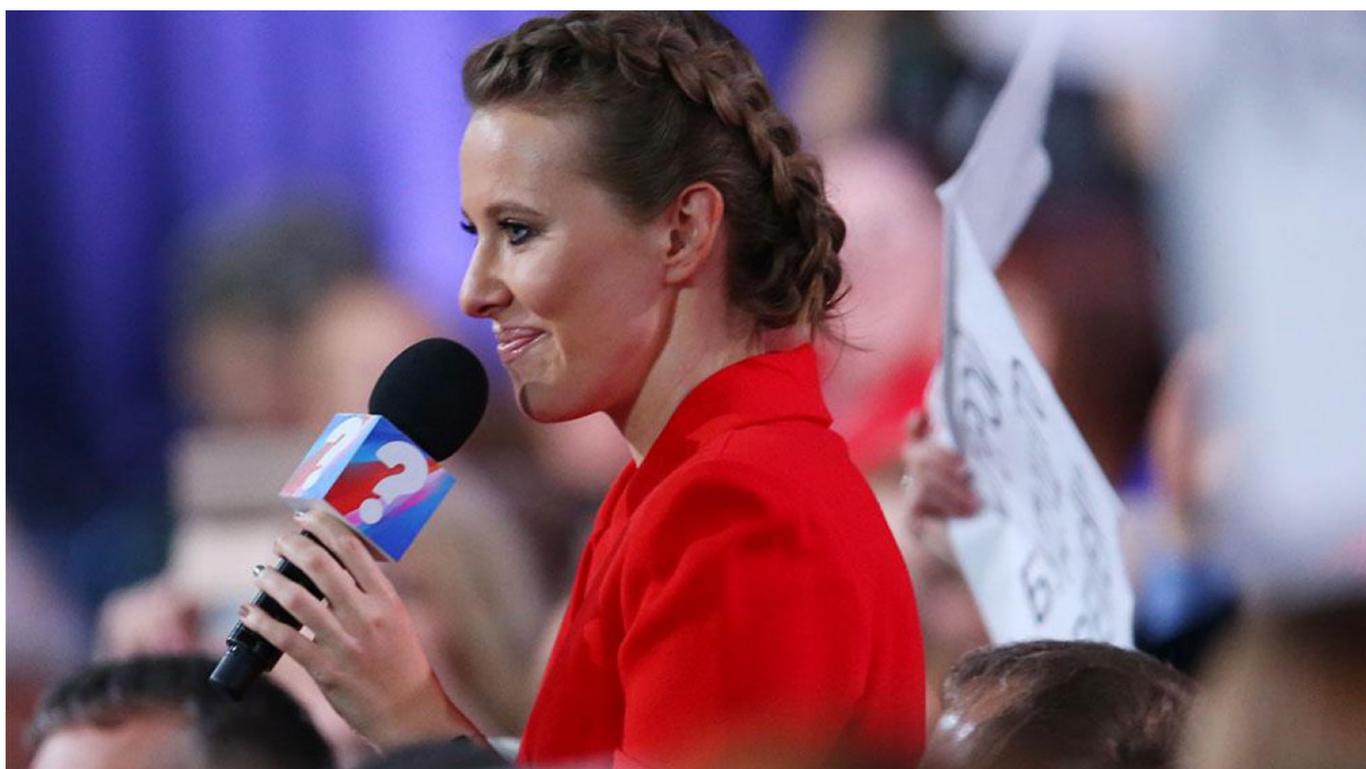


Putin Takes on Sobchak at Annual Presser, Snubs Navalny

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Ksenia Sobchak (Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS)

President Vladimir Putin at his annual press conference on Thursday said he does not fear opposition politicians and that Kremlin opponents should run constructive political campaigns.

Putin announced his reelection bid earlier this month and is widely expected to win a fourth term as president, extending his stay in power through 2024.

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“People understand that being an opposition activist in Russia means that you will either be killed or imprisoned,” presidential candidate and opposition-leaning journalist Sobchak was [cited](#) as saying by the Interfax news agency. “Is the government afraid of fair competition?”

Sobchak also made good on her promise to address opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been sidelined from participating in the elections because of a previous criminal conviction which his supporters say is politically motivated. Despite being barred from the elections, he has continued to campaign across the country and [issued](#) his political program on Wednesday.

"I assure you," Putin said in response, "the authorities are not afraid of anyone and have never been afraid of anyone."

The president criticized Sobchak's "against all" campaign slogan for being unconstructive and compared Navalny to Ukraine's opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili, who attempted to [escape](#) arrest earlier this month by fleeing to the roof of his apartment in Kiev.

"About those people you mentioned," Putin said of Navalny, while avoiding his name, "this is like the Russian edition of Saakashvili."

Soon after, Navalny [tweeted](#) a response.

"I'm adding the phrase 'those you mentioned' to my collection of words-to-use-to-avoid-saying-Navalny."

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