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Russians Are Increasingly Protesting Social, Not Political Issues – Study

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Yuri Kochetkov / EPA / TASS

Russians are increasingly likely to rally over social than political issues, according to a newly released study of protests in the first three months of 2019.

Freedom of assembly has been gradually restricted in Russia since a wave of mass protests in 2011-2012 against President Vladimir Putin. Observers say that nonpolitical demonstrations have become more frequent in recent years amid a rise in general discontent.

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More than one-third of 429 rallies in 2019 concerned social issues, the Center for Social and Labor Rights said in a study published Friday. That's almost double the 86 social protests flagged in the same period of 2018.

More than half of the social protests focused on rising trash pickup costs, unpopular

retirement age hikes and benefit cuts, the Moscow-based NGO said.

Study author Anna Ochkina said the protests have spread across Russia this year, with residents far outside the country's urban centers now taking to the streets over local and regional issues.

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"The geography is now very diverse," she told the Kommersant business daily Saturday. "These cities rarely flashed on the map of protest activity two or three years ago."

Environmentalists, defrauded co-investors and other issues-based protesters increasingly prefer not to refer to their actions as political, said Lev Gudkov, the head of Russia's independent Levada Center polling agency.

"It's common conformism stemming from the Soviet era," he told Kommersant.

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