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Putin Plays Down Moscow Protests, Blames Opposition for 'Falsification'

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Russian opposition members were banned from running for Moscow's legislature because they had submitted "falsified" signatures, President Vladimir Putin has said, playing down the election protests that rocked the capital this summer.

Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated in central Moscow since mid-July in support of the opposition candidates. Authorities barred the candidates from running on the grounds that they failed to collect enough genuine signatures of support, an assertion the candidates reject as false.

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The opposition candidates had submitted signature lists which included dead voters' names to get on the ballot for the Moscow City Duma, Putin said at a press conference in Finland on Wednesday.

“This was not a mistake, this was [a] falsification,” Putin said alongside Finnish President Sauli Niinistö in Helsinki, noting that “these candidates had violated the law.”

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The Russian leader continued to dismiss criticism that law enforcement used violence in cracking down on Moscow demonstrators, pointing to political protests in Europe that “are much larger and have dire consequences” for activists.

“There are many victims there [in Europe]; thousands of injured demonstrators, including [some who were] heavily injured, and thousands of injured law enforcement officers,” Putin said at the Helsinki press conference.

Earlier this week, Putin had told French President Emmanuel Macron that he did not want a repeat of France's "yellow vest" demonstrations in Moscow.

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