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With Temperature Checks and Face Masks, Russians Protest Putin Despite Coronavirus

By Polina Ivanova for Reuters

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A participant in a rally against Putin's proposed constitutional amendments in the city of Kazan. **Yegor Aleyev / TASS**

Small-scale protests against Vladimir Putin's plans to amend the Russian Constitution so he can run for president again in 2024 took place in several medium-sized Russian cities on Sunday, local media reported.

Protests against the changes, which would overturn a constitutional ban on Putin running for another term, were called off in Moscow and St. Petersburg due to measures imposed to contain the spread of coronavirus.

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The changes, which could allow Putin to remain in power until 2036, are due to be put to a nationwide vote on April 22. That vote is for now still going ahead despite the suspension of most public events and restrictions on mass gatherings in many Russian cities.

On Sunday, 19 people took part in a protest in Kazan, the capital of the mainly Muslim region of Tatarstan, located 800 kilometers (500 miles) east of Moscow, after authorities said they would only authorize a demonstration of 20 people or fewer, Interfax reported.

"The area (around the protest) was closed off, with 19 people inside — protesters holding placards," Ruslan Zinatullin, a member of the opposition Yabloko party, was cited by Interfax as saying.

"People were given masks, people's temperatures were checked, and hands were washed with alcohol solution," Zinatullin was cited as saying.

In Siberia a demonstration in the city of Krasnoyarsk attracted around 250 people, and 30 protested in Novosibirsk, local news outlets reported.

Protesters held up banners reading "No to the usurpation of power" and "We don't need a tsar," photos from the events showed.

A picket in the Ural mountains city of Yekaterinburg attracted around 30 people, one of the organizers, Sergei Khorenzhenko, said on social media. A demonstration in nearby Tyumen attracted similar numbers, Interfax reported.

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