

Russian Opposition Holds Online Protest Against Putin

By [AFP](#)

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Russian opposition activists avoided lockdown measures by holding an online protest on Tuesday against President Vladimir Putin's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Speakers also criticized Putin's proposed constitutional changes that allow him to extend his stay in office.

But the YouTube feed experienced serious technical problems, making the speeches initially inaudible and the number of viewers was only around four thousand.

The online event was organized by a group called "The No Campaign," led by Ilya Azar, a journalist at independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta and a municipal lawmaker.

The online format aimed to recreate the feeling of a street demonstration as Moscow is under a strict lockdown, Azar told AFP.

"In normal times it would be weird to organize a rally online," he said. "This is an attempt to

find a new format."

The glitch-prone event contrasted with previous slick online presentations by Russia's main opposition politician Alexei Navalny, who did not take part.

Opposition politician Dmitry Gudkov had to repeat his entire speech due to lack of sound.

"We are forced to use this format, unfortunately," he said. "I'd be glad to see you all in a Moscow square."

He attacked the government for failing to provide "decent compensation" for those who are unable to work due to the lockdown.

"In most European countries ... the authorities are spending hundreds of billions and even trillions of dollars to save their citizens, save small and medium sized businesses," he said.

"In Russia it's the absolute opposite."

Related article: [Russians' Trust in Putin Hits 14-Year Low – State Poll](#)

Speaking with a collection of soft toys in the background, Azar said the online event did not have official authorization, which is required for street demonstrations.

"I hope special forces don't come knocking at my door," he added.

Focusing on a planned vote on constitutional amendments, he told viewers that Putin "has turned into an ageing dictator, desperately holding onto power."

Putin is calling for a national referendum on constitutional changes that would make it possible for him to serve new presidential terms without a break.

The vote was postponed from April 22 as the number of virus cases grew sharply.

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