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Half of Russians Skeptical Toward Navalny Poisoning – Poll

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European scientists established that Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent from the Soviet-designed Novichok group. **Dimitar Dilkoff / AFP**

Around half of Russians believe that Western secret agents orchestrated leading opposition figure Alexei Navalny's poisoning or that he wasn't poisoned at all, according to an independent survey published Thursday.

Navalny fell into a coma on Aug. 20 on a flight from Siberia to Moscow. He was flown for treatment to Germany two days later, where European scientists established that he was poisoned with a nerve agent from the Soviet-designed Novichok group.

Related article: Lancet Publishes German Doctors' Navalny Treatment Report

Nearly half of Russian respondents told the Levada Center polling agency they believe that Navalny's poisoning was either faked or a "provocation" by the West.

According to Levada, 30% of respondents said the incident was “staged” and 19% said that foreign intelligence agencies arranged and executed the poisoning.

Only 15% agreed with Navalny’s own assessment that Russian authorities carried out the poisoning in an attempt to “eliminate a political opponent.”

The survey comes as the U.S. State Department laid the blame for Navalny's poisoning on Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) after the publication of a joint media investigation implicating an FSB chemical weapons unit.

“There is no plausible explanation for Mr. Navalny's poisoning other than Russian government involvement and responsibility,” CNN quoted an unnamed State Department spokesperson as saying Wednesday.

The State Department accused Russian authorities of promoting “numerous, often contradictory, conspiracy theories” as a “means to deflect attention from the serious questions before the Russian government.”

The European Union has sanctioned six Russian officials and a state scientific institute over the poisoning. Moscow, which denies both the poisoning and the government’s involvement, retaliated this week with travel bans targeting officials from EU member states.

Levada polled 1,617 Russians by phone on Dec. 21-23, 78% of whom said they closely follow or have heard something about Navalny’s poisoning.

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