

Russian University Administrator Steps Down After Trick Pro-Putin Flashmob

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Students were reportedly shocked to learn that their participation in a performance for a state holiday had been repackaged into a pro-Putin flashmob. **Screenshot Telegram**

A senior Russian university administrator has resigned after tricking students into filming a flashmob in support of President Vladimir Putin following mass nationwide protests that criticized his rule, local media [reported](#) Wednesday.

The students were [shocked](#) to learn that their participation in a coordinated hand- and flag-waving performance for a state holiday had been repackaged into a pro-Putin flashmob, news outlets in the Russian city of Belgorod near the Ukrainian border reported earlier this month.

Embed:

Belgorod State Institute of Arts and Culture vice-rector Natalia Baranichenko met with and [apologized](#) to the students earlier this week, according to the Belgorod No. 1 Telegram channel. She allegedly defended the doctored video — with overdubbed “Putin is our

president” chants — as a “social service contract” that she was unable to inform them of in advance, the channel added.

Baranichenko stepped down Wednesday following the scandal, the local Fonar Telegram channel [reported](#). Her biography has been scrubbed from the institute’s website.

Regional lawmakers took down the trick flashmobs from their Instagram accounts following complaints by the students’ parents, the Bel.ru news website [reported](#).

Related article: [Pro-Putin Corporate Culture Behind Viral ‘Flashmob’ Videos](#)

It is at least the [third](#) known incident involving Russian students being [misled](#) into filming pro-Putin flashmobs amid mass protests supporting jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny and criticizing Putin. A Russian e-commerce company known for its patriotic corporate culture also published at least two now-viral videos of thousands of its employees professing loyalty to Putin days after the protests.

Observers have ascribed the latest bevy of pro-Putin flashmobs to the Kremlin’s attempt to drown out anti-Putin sentiment amid falling incomes and rising poverty.

The Meduza news website [reported](#), citing unnamed sources, that the flashmobs were organized at the Kremlin’s and the pro-Kremlin United Russia party’s request. The Kremlin has denied involvement in the videos.

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