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Pro-Navalny Flashlight Flashmob a Success Despite Lack of Crowds, Allies Say

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Navalny supporters lit up flashlights and candles in their courtyards in solidarity with the jailed Kremlin critic. **Yevgeny Sophiichuk / TASS**

Courtyard protests across Russia in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny were a success despite lacking the massive crowds of previous rallies, his team said Monday.

The Valentine's Day demonstrations saw Navalny supporters hold up flashlights and candles in residential courtyards rather than stage traditional street protests. Photos from the event flooded social media with a trending hashtag that translates to "Love is stronger than fear."

"Yesterday's action was planned in such a way that it's fundamentally impossible to count how many people came out — and there were no detainees," Navalny's top aide Leonid Volkov said in a Facebook post Monday.

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Volkov complained that journalists were fixated on the number of people who took part in the event and the number of people detained.

"Instead of discussing [the protests'] content and political meaning, there is always just a discussion of numbers. Always. But not this time; we broke the mold," wrote Volkov, who had announced plans for Sunday's protests from his current residence of Lithuania.

Based on the number of social media posts, it can be assumed that tens of thousands of Russians took part in Sunday's event, Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, told the independent Dozhd news broadcaster.

Tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets on Jan. 23 and Jan. 31 and Feb. 2 in reaction to Navalny's jailing and his investigation into President Vladimir Putin's alleged palace. The rallies were some of the largest in Russia's recent history and were met with mass detentions and widespread allegations of police violence.

The Kremlin said Monday that there were no mass arrests Sunday because the protesters had not violated any laws.

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