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Navalny's 'Putin's Palace' Investigation Named Most Popular Video on Russian YouTube in 2021

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Alexei Navalny / YouTube

Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's investigation into President Vladimir Putin's alleged $1.3 billion palace was the most popular video on Russian YouTube in 2021, the video platform announced Monday.

Navalny's team released the in-depth investigation — which alleges that Putin and his close associates laundered money to build the opulent Black Sea palace — after he was detained upon his January return from Germany, where he was in recovery from a near-fatal poisoning in Siberia. To date, it has been viewed over 119 million times.

Related article: 1 in 4 Russians Watched Navalny's 'Putin Palace' Investigation – Poll

The video helped fuel unprecedented nationwide protests calling for Navalny's release in late

January and early February, with the palace's alleged "Aquadiscotheque" described in the video becoming a rallying cry against high-level corruption.

The rallies, which hadn't been authorized by the authorities, were met with a harsh crackdown, with thousands detained over the course of the protests and widespread reports of police brutality.

In the nearly 12 months since, Russia has seen what Kremlin critics have called a sweeping crackdown on dissenting voices.

In February, Navalny was sentenced to 2.5 years in a prison colony east of Moscow for violating parole while recovering from the August 2020 poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin.

Navalny and his supporters call that verdict — as well as the original 2014 fraud case in which he was sentenced to parole — trumped up.

A dozen opposition activists, including Navalny's brother Oleg and members of the Pussy Riot punk collective, spent nearly the entire year under house arrest for calling on supporters to take to the streets at the January protests.

In June, Russia formally outlawed Navalny's political and activist networks — both peaceful opposition movements — as "extremist" organizations, banning their activities within the country and putting members and financial donors at risk of prison time.

Since then, virtually all of Navalny's top-level aides and associates have fled abroad, mainly to Georgia or the Baltic states, to escape criminal prosecution.

Navalny and his team's campaign to rally supporters behind candidates most likely to unseat pro-Kremlin incumbents in September's parliamentary elections failed to shake the ruling United Russia party's majority.

According to YouTube, the second most-popular video of 2021 was an episode of web series "What Happened Next?" featuring comedic actor Anton Lapenko and TV presenter and producer Alexander Gudkov.

Popular YouTuber Yury Dud's interview with blogger Ivangai — which resulted in Dud being accused of "drug propaganda" — came in at No. 3.

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