Moscow riot cops drag away protesters as 50,000 strong crowd demand fair Russian elections outside Vladimir Putin’s offices

August 10, 2019

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The Sun

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9696467/moscow-protests-elections-russia-latest-news/>

RUSSIAN riot cops dragged away protesters as the 50,000 strong crowd demanded fair elections outside Vladimir Putin’s offices in Moscow.

The demonstration, which has been taking place on the last two Saturdays, has so far seen hundreds of people detained at the largest opposition rally since 2011 in the country's capital.

Tens of thousands of people rallied Saturday against the exclusion of some city council candidates from Moscow's upcoming election, turning out for one of the Moscow's biggest political protests in years.

After the rally, which was officially sanctioned, hundreds of participants streamed to an area near the presidential administration building to continue with an unauthorised demonstration.

SECOND MASS PROTEST

They were confronted by riot police and the arrest-monitoring group OVD-Info said 136 people were detained.

The rally was the fourth consecutive weekend demonstration in Moscow over the local election.

The determined opposition has prompted protests in other cities, reflecting widespread frustration with Russia's tightly controlled politics.

The protest attracted some 50,000 people, said Beliy Schetchik, an organisation that counts public meeting attendance.

OVD-Info also said 86 people were arrested Saturday in St Petersburg at an unsanctioned demonstration in support of the [Moscow](https://www.thesun.co.uk/where/moscow/) protests.

Unlike the previous two Moscow rallies, where police harshly dispersed the crowds and detained thousands of demonstrators, Saturday's gathering in a neighbourhood with relatively few passers-by was officially sanctioned.

It was held on a street flanked by high buildings and sandwiched between two busy thoroughfares.

Lyubov Sobol, one of the city council candidates denied a place on the ballot and a spearhead of the election protest, was among those detained in Moscow on Saturday.

A video on Sobol's Twitter feed showed officers breaking into her office as she demanded an explanation from them.

Small related protests also were reported in several Siberian cities on Saturday.

TOUGH CRACKDOWN

Last month, [Russian cops arrested more than 1,000 people in Moscow](https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9599413/russian-cops-anti-putin-protests-riots/) in one of the toughest crackdowns on anti-[Putin](https://www.thesun.co.uk/who/vladimir-putin/) protesters in years.

Demonstrators decrying the leader's grip on power were beaten and dragged away to cells as security forces used batons to storm the crowds.

Police wrestled with demonstrators around the mayor's office, often charging into the crowd with their batons raised.

Amnesty International described the security force's "military" style tactics as reaching a "new low".

Natalia Zviagina, Director of Amnesty in Russia, said: "Russian authorities hit a new low by imposing military law-like security measures on the unsanctioned rally, blocking access to major Moscow streets and shutting down businesses.

“We demand that the Russian authorities conduct an immediate, full and effective investigation into these incidents and ensure that the victims of police violence gain retribution in competent courts.

"All peaceful protesters must be immediately released; no one should be imprisoned for merely exercising their rights to expression and peaceful assembly.”

State news agencies Tass cited police as saying 1,074 were arrested over the course of the protests, which lasted more than seven hours.

PUTIN RATINGS HIGH

Authorities say they were barred because they failed to collect sufficient genuine signatures in their support.

The opposition has no seats in parliament and is starved of air time on state TV where many Russians still get their news.

Opinion polls in the past have shown support for Navalny, a lawyer and anti-corruption activist, only in the single digits.

But backers note he won almost a third of the vote in a 2013 Moscow mayoral race and say his movement could build momentum in the Russian capital if allowed to compete fairly.

Though Putin's approval rating is still high at well over 60 per cent, it is lower than it used to be due to discontent over years of falling incomes.