

INFO PACK

The Navalny Case:
The Anatomy of a Political Movement

TRT WORLD research centre

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Introduction

Alexey Navalny is a Russian opposition leader, lawyer and public political figure who gained fame for his investigations into corruption in Russia. He positions himself as the primary opponent of the Russian leadership led by President Vladimir Putin. Navalny is the founder of the "Anti-Corruption Fund", which unites subsidiary projects: "Smart Vote", "Navalny's Trade Union", "RosPil", "RosZhKH", "RosYama", "RosVybory", "Good Machine of Truth". He is also the owner of two popular YouTube channels: "Alexey Navalny" and "Navalny LIVE»

Since the beginning of the 2010s, Navalny has been the accused, defendant and witness in several criminal, administrative, civil and arbitration cases that he and his supporters consider politically motivated. In 2009, Navalny was recognised by the Vedomosti newspaper as the "person of the year" and in 2012 Time Magazine included him in the ranking of the "100 Most Influential People in the World", followed by the list of the "25 Most Influential People on the Internet". In 2017 and 2019, he was selected as the Vedomosti Politician of the Year. According to the Romir research centre, in the fall of 2020, he was ranked 4th in a rating of trust among Russians, having risen from the 19th position in six months. He was also nominated for the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

On August 20, 2020, as a result of poisoning, Navalny fell into a coma. From August 22 to September 22 he was treated at the Charite hospital in Berlin. After being discharged, he underwent rehabilitation in Germany.

On February 3, 2020, the Simonovsky Court of Moscow granted the request of the Federal Penitentiary Service and sentenced Navalny to two years and eight months in a prison colony in a landmark decision for Putin's crackdown on the country's leading opposition figure. The government's decision came despite massive street protests and international criticism from the US government and other foreign leaders. Near the courthouse, the police detained 370 people during the protests. Ambassadors and state representatives from more than half a dozen western countries audited the court proceedings. Navalny had blamed Putin for organising his assassination with the poison novichok, igniting mass protests across Russia. This info pack aims to present the primary development stages of Alexey Navalny's social movement at the federal and regional levels and lays down the latest case of "Yves Rocher."



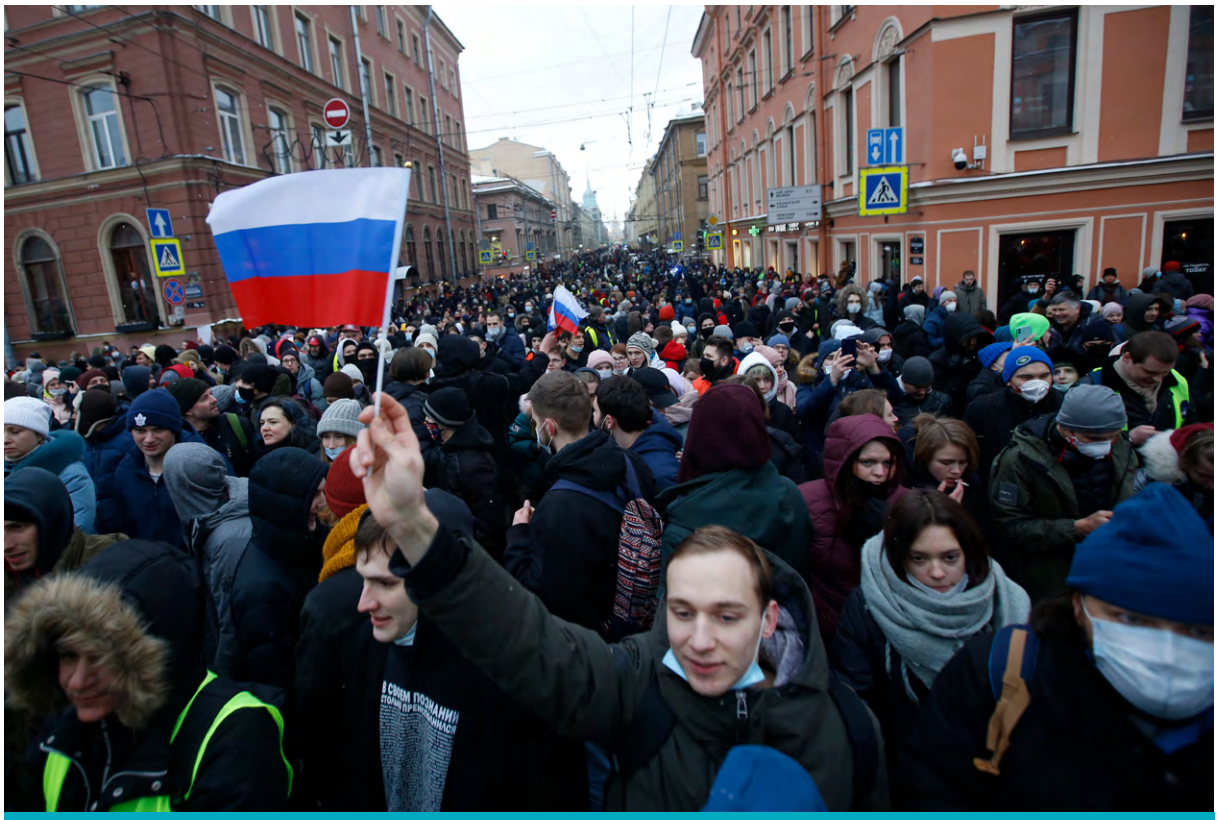
Source: Police officers detain anti-corruption campaigner and opposition figure Alexei Navalny during an opposition rally on March 26, 2017 in Moscow. (Evgeny Feldman - Anadolu Agency)

Alexey Navalny's Political Profile

Initially, Navalny's supporters did not label themselves as a social movement but preferred the designation of a "social campaign". The movement did not state their strategic goals but outlined a tactical one: to nominate Alexey Navalny for the presidency.

In 2007, Navalny became a co-founder of the national democratic movement called "The People". On June 23 and 24, 2007, the founding conference of the movement and its political council's first meeting was held in Moscow. The co-chairs of the movement were Sergey Gulyaev, Alexey Navalny and Zakhar Prilepin. At the conference, Navalny noted that nationalism is one of the "critical defining points" of the movement's ideology and referred to "ordinary Russian nationalists". Navalny participated in the Russian nationalist marches in 2006 and 2008. Initially, he was an observer for Yabloko before later becoming a representative of the Narod movement.

Navalny repeatedly stated that the most acceptable option for the 2011 State Duma elections was to vote "for any party, against United Russia". Following parliamentary elections and allegations of electoral fraud, about 6,000 people gathered in Moscow to object over the contested decision, and some 300 were detained including Navalny. On December 5, 2011, the day after the election, Navalny spoke at a rally sanctioned by the authorities and held by the Solidarity Movement on Chistoprudny Boulevard. The rally's purpose was to express disagreement with the results of the election and accuse the authorities of large-scale fraud. After the event, he and several hundred other participants took part in an unauthorised march to the building of the Central Election Commission of Russia in Lubyanka, during which the police detained him. A court hearing was held the next day, at which the judge found Navalny guilty of resisting law enforcement officers and sentenced him to 15 days of administrative detention. This decision caused discontent both among the opposition and among a number of well-known lawyers. Navalny was released from custody on December 21, 2011, and despite the late hour of his release, he was met by numerous journalists and supporters.



People attend the Freedom to Alexei Navalny rally in Saint-Petersburg, Russia on January 31, 2021. (Sergey Mihailicenko - Anadolu Agency)



Barricades are set up by police and police vehicles around the demonstration site during a protest demanding the release of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Moscow, Russia on January 31, 2021. Streets in the area where the demonstrations will be held in the capital were closed to traffic. (Sefa Karacan - Anadolu Agency)

Navalny called on Russians to join against the Kremlin's current administration, saying he would try to seize victory in the March 4, 2012 presidential election. Upon his release, Navalny told reporters that he would "be ready" to run if free and fair elections were held. After Putin's re-election as president, Navalny led an anti-Putin rally in Moscow, at which between 14,000 and 20,000 people were present.

On April 4, 2013, Navalny announced that he planned to win the post of president of Russia in the future, motivated by the fact he "wants to change life in the country", and ensure that the inhabitants of Russia, a country rich in natural resources, do not live "in poverty and hopeless squalor", but rather, live "normally, as in European countries".

In 2011, Navalny, drawing attention to excessive subsidies being sent to Chechnya, supported the nationalist slogan "Stop feeding the Caucasus", and advocated for the introduction of a visa regime with the countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia. In 2012, he supported the People's Alliance party, which was created by his colleagues in the Anti-Corruption Fund and the Opposition Coordination Council as the "party of Navalny supporters". In 2013, after the Russian Ministry of Justice twice refused to register the party (the party itself considered the grounds for refusing registration far-fetched), he decided to change tactics and officially join the party's organising committee. At the new constituent congress, he was elected as a chairman of its governing body, the Central Council. At the end of 2013, it became known that one of the already officially registered Russian political parties had decided to rename itself the "People's Alliance", which made it impossible to register Navalny's party under this name. The party submitted documents to the Ministry of Justice and was refused. In February 2014, the party was renamed the "Progress Party", and on February 25, it was officially registered with the Ministry of Justice. However, in order to gain the right to participate in the elections, the party was required to register separately in most of Russia's Federal regions within six months. Within this time frame, the Progress Party was unable to register in most of the subjects. At the same time, according to party members — as well as several other politicians, journalists, sociologists and ordinary citizens — refusal to register the party's regional offices was illegal. Nevertheless, the "Progress Party" was liquidated by the Ministry of Justice's decision on April 28, 2015. On May 19, the founding congress of the party "Russia of the Future" was held, but the party's registration was refused.

In 2013, Navalny was nominated as a candidate from the People's Freedom Party-PARNAS for the Moscow mayoral elections and appointed the head of the election headquarters of the Ural politician Leonid Volkov. On August 23, in an interview with Ekho Moscow radio, Navalny said that if he won the election, the powers of local self-government would be seriously expanded, conflict situations around any new construction would be resolved through a referendum of local residents, the city's migration policy would be radically changed. He has been advocating for a more transparent policy on this matter and has criticised the authorities for the prevailing lack of control over migrant numbers, blaming the government for profiting from the widespread bribery and fraud linked to immigration. By openly using nationalist rhetoric, he decided to adopt anti-immigration orientation in his policies. LGBTQ parades would be allowed, however, as they fall under the constitutional right of citizens to gather peacefully.

The 2018 Presidential Elections

On December 13, 2016, Navalny announced that he intended to run in the 2018 presidential election, published the main provisions of his election programme and gathered his supporters. He opened an online registration of voters who were ready to sign for his nomination and volunteers who wanted to work during the campaign. He then began fundraising through crowdfunding.

In February 2013, a court in the Russian city of Kirov pronounced Navalny and two co-defendants guilty of stealing from the Kirovles lumber corporation following a retrial. This case was widely seen as politically motivated and aimed at damaging Navalny's political profile. The second verdict in 2017 in the Kirovles case was handed down, almost identical to the first, which revoked Navalny's candidacy. The European External Relations Service said the verdict was an attempt to silence yet another independent politician in the Russian Federation. In March, June and October 2017, Navalny organised mass protests against corruption. On March 26, 2017, at the call of Navalny, rallies were held in many cities across Russia. According to the organisers, they organised to demand answers from the authorities concerning the investigation of the Anti-Corruption Foundation of the documentary "He is not Dimon to You", which detailed alleged corruption by former Russian President and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The actions took place in 79 cities across Russia, more than 1000 demonstrators were detained, and according to the Levada Center, more than 38 per cent of surveyed citizens supported Navalny and the protests.

The campaign faced several obstacles. On March 27, 2017, by the Tverskoy Court of Moscow's decision, he was subjected to administrative arrest for 15 days for disobeying police officers during detention and fined 20 thousand rubles for organising a rally on March 26. On April 27 in Moscow, an unknown person threw caustic liquid in his face as a result of which Navalny received a chemical burn in his right eye resulting in a partial loss of vision. On May 8, he underwent surgery in Barcelona.

On September 29, 2017, Alexey Navalny was detained in his house as he was leaving to attend a rally in Nizhny Novgorod. On December 24, 2017, meetings of initiative groups to nominate Navalny as a presidential candidate were held in 20 Russian cities. On December 25, 2017, the Central Election Commission of Russia declined to register Navalny as a candidate for the election due to his outstanding criminal record in the Kirovles case.

By the end of December 2017, according to Navalny, 704,000 people had promised to support his campaign. Navalny's chief of staff, Leonid Volkov, formulated the campaign's objectives: preparing to collect signatures, training observers and campaigning. By the end of December 2017, regional headquarters were established in 84 Russian cities; the first one opened on February 4, 2017, in St. Petersburg. On December 28, the Vedomosti newspaper's editorial board chose Navalny as its politician of the year. The editors noted that Navalny was the only politician who conducted a fully-fledged election campaign in the pre-election year of 2017. According to the editorial board, he has become a key figure in forming the agenda of the future presidential elections.

From 2011 to 2018, Navalny experienced 10 administrative arrests. During this period, he spent a total of 192 days in a detention centre. According to Deutsche Welle's calculations, the time spent by Navalny behind bars increased dramatically in 2017 and 2018, amounting to a total of 80 days.

Poisoning and Recovery

On August 20, 2020, Navalny fell ill during a flight from Tomsk to Moscow. The plane made an emergency landing in Omsk, where Navalny, unconscious, was hospitalised in the City Clinical Hospital of Emergency Medical Care No. 1. The hospital's deputy chief doctor announced that Navalny had fallen into a coma and was connected to a ventilator. Navalny's press secretary, Kira Yarmysh, said that Navalny did not eat anything on the day of departure, but only drank tea bought at the Tomsk airport. The hospital said that Navalny's situation was serious but stable; initially, it was said that Navalny was poisoned, but later the deputy chief doctor clarified that this was only one of the options for explaining his sudden illness. A plane was sent from Germany to bring him to the Charite clinic in Berlin. A council of Russian doctors found Navalny's condition "unstable" and "untransportable" and refused

permission for transportation. Later, they announced that his condition was getting and better and stable enough for transport. His wife Yulia Navalnaya travelled with him on a medical evacuation flight. On August 22, Navalny has landed at Tegel airport in Berlin.

. On August 24, German doctors announced that they had found traces of poison from a substance from the group of cholinesterase inhibitors. Cholinesterase inhibitors are a group of substances, which are normally used to ease the symptoms of dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease. Since November 2019, the group of cholinesterase inhibitors known as novichoks have been banned as chemical compounds and agents of warfare under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Common side effects of cholinesterase inhibitors include insomnia, nausea and vomiting, and headache. The Novichok Agent- also known as the "N-series"- was used to target ex-Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, UK. On September 2, the German authorities said that Navalny was poisoned with a military poison from the Novichok group.

The poisoning of Navalny caused an international outcry. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, European Union Diplomatic Chief Josep Borrel and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet all called on Russia to conduct a transparent investigation, identify and bring those responsible for the crime to justice. Angela Merkel issued a statement in which she described the attempt on Navalny's life as "a crime against the basic values for which we stand." Boris Johnson said that the poisoning of Navalny "shocked the world."

Russian authorities rejected accusations of involvement in the poisoning and demanded access to all the Berlin data. The Prosecutor General's Office of Russia said that they did not see any grounds for initiating a criminal case on the incident. The Russian Interior Ministry conducted a pre-investigation check, during which it did not find "any data indicating the commission of intentional criminal acts" against Navalny. Navalny himself believes that Russian President Vladimir Putin is directly behind his poisoning.

On September 7, 2020, Navalny was brought out of a medical coma, and on September 14 he was disconnected from the ventilator. On September 22, Navalny was discharged from Charite, where he spent 32 days, 24 of them in intensive care.

On October 6, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirmed the bulk cholinesterase inhibitor's detection from the Novichok group in samples taken from Navalny. On October 15, for the "usage of chemical weapons to attempt to kill Alexey Navalny", the European Union and the United Kingdom imposed sanctions against six Russians: FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov, head of the Russian President's Department for Domestic Policy Andrey Yarin, Deputy Defense Ministers of Russia Alexey Krivoruchko and Pavel Popov, as well as the presidential envoy to the Siberian Federal District Sergei Menyailo.



A photo shared on Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny's instagram account shows Alexey Navalny sitting on a bench after being released from Berlin's Charite Hospital in Berlin, Germany on September 23, 2020. Navalny, 44, and a critic of Russian President Putin, was in a German hospital for treatment for severe poisoning since Aug. 22. (Alexey Navalny's Instagram Account - Anadolu Agency)

Return to Russia

January 17, 2021, after Navalny was treated in Germany for the effects of poisoning, he returned to Russia and was detained in a grey area of Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport by the office staff operational management of the Federal Penitentiary Service. At the time, state officials stated that the detention was made in connection with Navalny's violations of the probation period in the Yves Rocher case. In 2014, Navalny and his brother Oleg were accused of laundering money and overcharging Yves Rocher Vostok, a French cosmetics company's subsidiary. Before the sentencing, the company confirmed that there was "no damage." However, a Russian court nevertheless handed sentences to Navalny and Oleg of three years and six months, respectively. While Navalny's decision was suspended, Oleg served three years behind bars. In a court decision, the European Court of Human Rights later declared the decision to be "arbitrary".

The hearing to determine the duration of custody for Navalny took place on January 18 in the 2nd police department of the city district of Khimki; independent journalists were not allowed to attend the open hearing.

A Palace for Putin: The Story of the Biggest Bribe

"A Palace for Putin: the Story of the Biggest Bribe" is an investigative documentary film created by Navalny and published by the Anti-Corruption Foundation in 2021. According to the authors of the documentary, the film tells the story of a corruption scheme headed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Most of the film is dedicated to "Putin's Palace", a residence in the Gelendzhik area of the Black Sea coast, allegedly owned by Vladimir Putin through his network of oligarchs. The palace complex area is 68 hectares, while 7,000 hectares of land around the palace is a closed-off territory, located in the area of Russia's Federal Security Service. The Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) estimated the cost of the palace complex at 100 billion rubles (1.1 billion euros).

The documentary was published on YouTube on January 19, 2021, shortly after Navalny's most recent arrest. The film reached the top ten on YouTube in 26 countries, ranking first in 10. As of February 7, 2021, the film has received more than 110 million views.

The investigation into the lavishly furnished palace of President Vladimir Putin in Gelendzhik has caused a stir among Internet users. The film's footage became the basis for creating many memes, and the impressive high cost of Putin's mansion became the source of numerous jokes. According to the Anti-Corruption Foundation, this palace is "protected by hundreds, even thousands of people - from unknown guards, gardeners and builders to the richest and most famous people in Russia." Those working there are forbidden to bring mobile phones with a camera, and, according to Navalny, arriving cars are searched at several checkpoints, with the help of mirrors and a pit with video cameras. According to the investigation, the FSB prohibits fishing near the cape on which the palace stands, and flights are prohibited over the territory. The FSB said that the no-fly zone in the area of Cape Idokopas was established by order of the Ministry of Transport on July 24 last year in the interest of border security.

The authors of the investigation cited a scheme for financing the palace. According to the investigation, the property is estimated to be 17,691-square-meters and worth around $1.4 billion. Navalny's team exposed a subcontractor related in the construction of the building with detailed architectural plans along with listed items of furniture and examples of floor decorations. This scheme reportedly includes Putin's inner circle, such as the head of Transneft, Nikolai Tokarev, the head of Rosneft, Igor Sechin, and entrepreneurs Yuri Kovalchuk and Gennady Timchenko. The scheme also reportedly includes Svetlana Krivonogikh, whom the Project newspaper called a close friend of Putin, and gymnast Alina Kabaeva, whom the media also wrote about Putin's ties with.

Additionally, 17 per cent of Russians who have seen or heard about Alexey Navalny's film "The Palace for Putin" said that their attitude towards Putin has deteriorated, according to a survey by the Levada Center (included in the Kremlin's list of foreign agents).

The Yves Rocher Case

On January 11, the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) appealed to the Simonovsky court with a request to replace Navalny's deferred sentence with a real one, stating that Navalny had evaded the control of the criminal executive inspectorate. In 2014, Alexey Navalny and his brother Oleg were found guilty of fraud and money laundering in the Yves Rocher case. Oleg Navalny was sentenced to three and a half years in a general regime penal colony, while Alexey was sentenced to three and a half years of probation. His probation period expired on December 30, 2020.

The European Court of Human Rights in 2017 unanimously found that the case violated Articles 6 (right to a fair trial) and 7 (punishment solely based on law) of the European Convention.

In Moscow, the Simonovsky Court sentenced Alexey Navalny to two years and eight months in prison, changing his suspended sentence to a real term of imprisonment. Hundreds of Navalny supporters were detained at the protests during his trial and in the centre of Moscow after the verdict was announced. Navalny's defence team considered the court's decision to be illegitimate. During the hearing, lawyers argued that he regularly fulfilled all the obligations imposed on him after his suspended sentence.

The case was considered in the Moscow City Court building - the Simonovsky court decided to hold it there due to the large number of press accreditations that the court received from various media outlets to cover the trial. Navalny's supporters wanted to gather for a rally, but as early as eight in the morning, riot police were standing outside the courthouse, and police cars, paddy wagons and mounted police were on duty in its vicinity.

The representative of the Federal Penitentiary Service, who began his speech after the presentation of the parties, asked to send Navalny to a colony for 3.5 years, saying that in 2020, the politician failed to appear for registration with the criminal executive inspectorate seven times - including before the poisoning - and received warnings because of this. Navalny's defenders pointed out that in early 2020, Navalny notified the inspectorate that he would not be able to appear because he was going on vacation, but the Federal Penitentiary Service did not attach this document to the materials.

Mass Protests across Russia

On January 23, 2021, protests in Russia were announced by the Anti-Corruption Foundation in opposition to Navalny's dentention and in support of claims regarding corruption by the Putin administration. After a week, another wave of protests occurred in Moscow. The Interior Ministry estimated the protest number at 2,000 people "including media representatives". Although, according to Interfax, in the capital alone the police issued more than two thousand administrative protocols against the protesters. The human rights project "OVD-Info" counted more than 1,800 detainees. Moscow and St. Petersburg remained the centre of the protests, and protests expanded across the country, primarily in the Urals and Siberia in the cities of Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, and Krasnoyarsk.

Most of those arrested were held on charges of violence against a representative of authority (article 318 of the criminal code). In a note from prison, Navalny urged Russian citizens to "free" the country from a "bunch of thieves". Leonid Volkov, Navalny's chief strategist, made a live statement on a YouTube broadcast, saying the protests should pause until the spring as they already reached its peak. He further added that demonstrators won a "huge moral victory" and claimed that trying to continue with rallies each weekend would only lead to thousands of more arrests.

Yulia Navalnaya was also penalised for 20,000 roubles for supporting his anti-corruption campaign and attending a protest on 31 January. Women across the country have posted photos of themselves wearing red on social media in solidarity with Navalny's wife, as she wore a red in court the day her husband was imprisoned for two years and eight months. This online trend was caused by a fashion reporter, Katya Fedorova. Meanwhile, Navalnaya is turning into an influential opposition politician in her own right, which will likely increase the danger she may face in the upcoming months.

The Navalny saga is not yet complete. On the one hand, the imprisonment of the Russian dissident triggered condemnation from western powers and sanctions. On the other hand, Navalny's supporters continue to take to Russia's streets, dealing a serious blow to Putin's reputation. However, by unleashing repression against peaceful protesters and resorting to legislation to punish Navalny and his key associates, the Russian leadership is falling into a trap by validating Navalny's narrative and undermining the ruling elite's legitimacy.

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