

Russian March Resists Navalny

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Navalny waiting backstage to give a speech at the Russian March. Skinheads were among the participants. **Igor Tabakov**

Whistleblower Alexei Navalny tried to direct the fury of Moscow's Russian March at the Kremlin and its ruling "party of crooks and thieves" — transforming the nationalist rally into a mainstream opposition event.

But with police helicopters thundering overhead, Navalny found his argument largely overshadowed by the far more provocative images of a masked mob throwing up Nazi salutes and carrying "imperial" flags.

Slogans such as "Russia for Russians" and "[Expletive] the Caucasus" sparked far more enthusiasm than Navalny's anti-Kremlin rage during Friday's much-hyped nationalist gathering in the southeastern suburb of Lyublino.

Organizers claimed that some 20,000 came to the authorized event, which was held on National Unity Day. Police, however, put the number between 5,000 to 7,000, which

corresponded more closely with estimates by Moscow Times staff at the scene.

Ultrnationalists and open Nazi supporters had a heavy presence at the gathering, but unlike those behind the ugly Manezh Square riots last December, the rally passed without major incident — aside from a reporter getting punched in the face.

Though the journalist walked away with a bloody nose, the episode stirred no reaction from the several hundred riot police keeping a close eye on the event.

Smaller rallies with a few hundred participants took place in several other cities around Russia and in Ukraine's capital, Kiev, where a column of Russian nationalists came to blows with their Ukrainian counterparts.

Navalny, who calls himself a "national democrat," has attended the Russian March since it began in 2006. This year he was a co-organizer — much to the bewilderment of his supporters, who are largely liberals at odds with nationalists.

He focused on Kremlin-bashing and denouncing the ruling United Russia party, which he dubbed "the party of crooks and thieves." He also targeted "oligarchs" Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich, who are currently squaring off against each other in a London courtroom.

"Let's make it so that those bastards like Berezovsky, who started United Russia, and Abramovich, who's together with [Prime Minister Vladimir] Putin ... are afraid of us," Navalny exhorted the crowd.

His involvement did lure out some who may not have otherwise attended to the cold square by the Lyublino metro station.

"I came to get a look at the future president," said a middle-aged woman who refused to identify herself.

Another participant also said the event was changing and would be rid of nationalists one day.

"This is turning into a political rally, where there would be less of those guys," said 40-year-old Alexander, who carried a Norwegian flag at the behest of Russian friends living in Norway.

But that time seems far off, judging by the unruly and militant mob that dominated the event both on and off the stage — many wearing balaclavas and toting "imperial" black-yellow-white flags.

"We have to prepare our own militant groups, so the Russian order will be maintained in the streets," said Georgy Borovikov, head of the notorious anti-Semitic movement Pamyat.

The Manezh Square riots — triggered by the death of a Slavic football fan during a clash with North Caucasus nationals — featured prominently in many of the speeches.

No nationalists were ever convicted following the rioting, but the fan's killer — Kabardino-Balkaria native Aslan Cherkesov — was sentenced to 20 years in prison just days ahead of the rally.

The swift verdict was widely viewed as aimed at placating nationalists, but instead appeared to reinforce their self-assurance and belief in violence as the primary means of political campaigning.

"The power of law lies not with the objectivity of judges, but within the Russian street," known nationalist Ivan Mironov intoned in a speech about Manezh Square events.

The crowd spontaneously erupted into politically incorrect slogans throughout the event, and plenty of enthusiasts demonstrated Nazi salutes — the so-called "ziga zaga," named after the Nazi greeting "siege heil."

One self-admitted "fascist," who only introduced himself as Yegor, 28, gave a short historical lecture to a Moscow Times reporter, to make the distinction that "our grandfathers were fighting [German] national-socialists, while fascists were based in Italy and Spain, and there was nothing wrong with them."

One balaclava-wearing participant throwing up the salute — while a friend snapped pictures — insisted that it was not an exclusive greeting of the Nazis, and that the SS logo of fascist Germany's secret police was an "ancient Slavic symbol."

Other participants chose to stick with the issues — like the rise of migration into the country — rather than make provocative gestures.

"I am rallying for a better future for my children. I am not against other nationals. I just want them to respect my country," said Vladimir, 27.

But he admitted he represented a group called Russkiye — "The Russians" — which was founded last year by Dmitry Dyomushkin, a notorious ultranationalist whose previous, now-banned vehicle, the Slavic Union, adopted "SS" for its symbol.

Dyomushkin was a co-organizer of this year's rally. He was detained on extremism charges two days before the event, but police released him in time to attend — unlike another co-organizer, Konstantin Krylov, who was grabbed Friday by plainclothes police outside his house on hate-mongering charges. He was released later that day.

Navalny tried to explain his position in a lengthy [interview](#) to Lenta.ru on the eve of the "March," saying he was against the federal government's policy of pampering the volatile North Caucasus republics, ignoring rampant rights violations while infusing their economies with billions of dollars, most of which never reaches the populace.

He added that he hoped to change the annual Russian March, and the nationalist movement that drives it, into a moderate force that could one day be focused into a political organization.

"Radicals and marginals come to the forefront whenever an existing [nationalist] ideology — a vast, sane and peaceful one — is suppressed," Navalny said.

Navalny switched to nationalism in search of a new ideological platform, said Alexei Mukhin, head of the Center for Political Technologies.

"He sees the nationalists as his only chance to bring people to the street because people are

already growing bored with anti-corruption slogans," Mukhin said by telephone. He predicted that Navalny would have little luck because the radical nationalists would not fully accept his moderate stance.

But nationalist-leaning analyst Alexander Sevastyanov said many people across all social groups support the creation of a legal nationalist political party.

"We joke that there is a professor's nationalism and a locksmith's nationalism. But everyone agrees that Russia would either be a single-nation state or would not be at all," he said.

Three nationalists, including at least one participant of the Russian March, pleaded guilty Saturday to torching 11 cars across Moscow over an unspecified period of time, Interfax reported, citing city police. Two more cars were torched in the city's east hours after the announcement.

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