

# Protesters Send Signal to Putin: Let My People Go

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What do U.S. President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have in common? They are both fortunate in their presidential opponents.

Despite an ailing economy, Obama is likely to win his second term as he is facing the weakest field of Republican challengers in U.S. history. Obama will trounce either Mitt Romney or Newt Gingrich, currently tied in the Republican nomination battle, as neither of them has an answer to the biggest challenges facing the United States.☒

Putin is blessed with a lineup of pre-vetted opponents who have zero chance of upsetting his coronation next March.☒ Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy have developed a habit of running for president every four years as if it were part of their health regimen. Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov's previous run in 2004 was notable for the fact that he himself voted for Putin. Billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov gave away the open secret about being a Kremlin project when he said he was ready

to serve on the team of the winning candidate — Putin.

Still, the 2012 presidential race is much more competitive than any other since 2000. This is because all the candidates are under pressure to respond to the political demands of the protesters in Moscow.

Putin's opponents have come forward with credible plans for Russia's political democratization, including a constitutional ban on more than two presidential terms for life, term limits for elected governors, direct popular elections for senators and lower thresholds for political parties winning seats in the State Duma. All have pledged to disband the illegitimate sixth Duma and to hold new parliamentary elections with new opposition parties on the ballot. Mironov offered to serve as an interim president to implement the political reforms and hold a free presidential election in 2014.

Putin, on the contrary, shies away from any talk of political reform and is backtracking even on President Dmitry Medvedev's timid proposals. He published two rambling manifestos, which contained few specific ideas that might provide voters with a sense of his future policies.

His sales message is like that of Moses — "Trust me, only I can lead you through the wilderness to the Promised Land!"

He's been at this for 12 years, and we are still not out of the wilderness. He is now asking for 12 more. It's a hard sell.

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*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

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