

Pussy Riot, Putin's Russia and the Orthodox Church

Was punk band Pussy Riot's anti-Putin performance in a Moscow church 'religious hatred hooliganism' or an artistic form of political dissent? Olga Shvarova considers the case.



On 21 February 2012, the all-female punk group Pussy Riot [performed](#) a song in front of the altar at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. The song was inspired by a prayer to the Holy Virgin and asked for Putin's removal from office with the aid of divine power. In March, three members of the band were [arrested](#) on charges of "hooliganism on the grounds of religious hatred", detained without trial, and now face up to seven years in prison. The band members were presented with formal charges in July 2012, and their pre-trial detention was extended by six months. All three women were recognised as political prisoners by [Amnesty International](#).

Public opinion in Russia was divided over this case. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill condemned the band for blasphemy, and polls [show](#) that 42% of Muscovites agreed with him. Many others considered the offence minor and the actions of authorities excessive and arbitrary. An open letter calling for the immediate release of three Pussy Riot members was signed

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by a diverse range of Russian elites including supporters of Putin and members of the political opposition. In August 2012 the three band members were sentenced to two years in jail.

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