

Navalny's Opposition Candidates Knocked Out of City Council Race

July 14, 2014



Thirty-two of the current 35 members of the Moscow City Duma are members of United Russia, and all 11 independent candidates supported by United Russia.

Several opposition candidates allied with anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny have been knocked out of the Moscow City Duma race after failing to collect the necessary number of signatures, a requirement that has been criticized for giving the upper hand to the ruling party.

Only two of the nine candidates of the "For Moscow" coalition managed to submit the required number of signatures to the city's election commission by Friday, the final deadline: publicist Olga Romanova and political activist Maria Gaidar.

This year's Moscow City Duma elections, set for Sept. 14, will play by different rules, as it will be the first time voters will select deputies by single-mandate districts and choose individuals rather than political parties.

The reform, signed into law by President Vladimir Putin in February, is meant to make room

for new political leaders, but many opposition politicians say it actually works against them.

In accordance with the law, independent candidates are given 30 days to collect signatures from 3 percent of residents in their respective districts, which comes out to between 4,200 and 5,500 signatures, depending on the population of the district.

Critics of the election law have argued that this gives United Russia a distinct advantage over independent contenders, especially since the ruling party has access to more administrative resources, like state-run television channels.

Thirty-two of the current 35 members of the Moscow City Duma are members of United Russia, and all 11 independent candidates supported by United Russia were able to get the required amount of signatures by Friday, the RBC news outlet reported.

Opposition candidates were not so lucky. Nikolai Lyaskin of the Party for Progress, municipal deputy Maxim Motin and the leader of RPR-Parnas's Moscow branch, Ilya Yashin, all failed to acquire the necessary number of signatures by Friday.

"We really overestimated Navalny's effect," said Denis Bilunov, the head of the "For Moscow" coalition's campaign, in comments carried by RBC. Bilunov added that the coalition had been counting on "nostalgia for last summer," when thousands of people took to the streets in support of Navalny.

Three members of the "For Moscow" coalition who represent the opposition Yabloko party will be allowed to continue in the race, however, because they gained 3 percent of the vote in the previous election, which made them exempt from the signature requirement.

The election commission now has 10 days to check all the candidates' signatures before registering them for the race.

The Moscow City Duma election will be held on Sept. 14, with 45 deputies to be chosen for five-year terms.

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