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Smear Campaigns Skyrocket Ahead of Duma Elections

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Vedomosti

There have been a rising number of smear attacks on candidates for the upcoming elections to the State Duma, the Vedomosti business daily reported Thursday,☒citing a recent report by the Committee of Civic Initiative and several☒candidates who have experienced attacks.

A newspaper called Top Secret was☒recently distributed in Moscow's☒northwestern Tushino district, where opposition candidate Dmitry☒Gudkov is campaigning. The newspaper contained an article which claimed the district was turning into a "boot☒camp for Maidan," and an anti-Semitic story about Gudkov's campaign☒manager Maxim Kats, according to the report.

Top Secret is a well-known☒newspaper in Moscow, however, the issue in question is not affiliated with the newspaper in any way, sources at the newspaper told the TASS news☒agency. Gudkov's campaign plans to file a defamation complaint☒to the police on Thursday.

Several smear attacks have targeted candidates of the Communist party. On Tuesday, campaign materials were found in a warehouse which smeared Denis Parfyonov, a Communist candidate who is running against Green party politician Oleg Mitvol in Moscow's northeastern Medvedkovo district. “600,000 flyers and newspapers smearing Parfyonov were found there [in the warehouse], together with 'clean' flyers promoting Mitvol,” Communist party member Andrei Klychkov told Vedomosti.

In addition, newspapers imitating Communist publications have appeared in Moscow, smearing Communists and other opposition candidates, says party member Dmitry Novikov. The NTV TV channel and Channel 5 have aired shows targeting Communists, Klychkov added. The party have complained to the Central Election Commission, but to no avail.

The A Just Russia party and the opposition Parnas party have also been victims to smear attacks, Vedomosti reported. A newspaper without a publisher's imprint called Let's Gobble Up Russia, distributed across the country, attacked A Just Russia party leader Sergei Mironov and other party members. At least five television programs smearing Parnas candidates have aired, according to Vedomosti. All of the programs featured surveillance footage, says deputy chair of Parnas Konstantin Merzlikin, which he claims means that law enforcement services cooperated with the TV channels. Parnas asked the Rossia 1 and Ren TV channels to give them air time for a rebuttal, but the channels refused.

On Thursday, portraits of opposition candidates appeared on a monument on the central Bolotnaya Ploshchad that symbolizes the main vices. Framed photos of Dmitry Gudkov, Mikhail Kasyanov, Maria Baronova and others were each placed near a certain vice, the pro-Kremlin news website Ridus reported. In addition to the portraits, unknown authors of the “installation” brought several ballot-boxes to the monument, filled with objects that are meant to symbolize “poverty, devastation, violence and gay propaganda” the opposition will bring to Russia if it wins the election, the report said.

Political analyst Alexander Kynev told Vedomosti that the amount of smear attacks has been greater in this election than ever before. These attacks are aimed at lowering the ratings of opposition candidates and breaking down trust in elections. However, too many smear attacks on well-known candidates can have the opposite effect, according to Kynev. ''Too many low-quality smear attacks can actually increase a candidate's ratings and promote sympathy for them.''

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