

Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman on Why Russians Should Boycott the Elections

"Not voting is a matter of principle, of hygiene."

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The Moscow Times spoke with opposition politician Yevgeny Roizman, who has been the mayor of Yekaterinburg since he defeated a United Russia candidate in 2013.

Roizman has openly supported opposition leader Alexei Navalny in calling for an electoral boycott of the upcoming presidential elections. Here is why.

On the presidential election in March

"These are not elections. I have known the result for a long time and so has everyone else. The only unknown is the turnout. If there is a low turnout, the victory will feel incomplete. The Kremlin has to convince itself, the electorate and the outside world that this is a government

chosen voluntarily by a large majority.

This is why all its resources — including the media and the candidates — have been given only one assignment: to increase the turnout."

On Alexei Navalny's call for a boycott

"In 2017, I was excluded from the gubernatorial elections. I said then they couldn't be called elections because there wasn't a single real candidate participating. I am not going to vote in March because I don't want to participate in non-elections. If Navalny works hard to promote a boycott, he could have a real statistical impact. But, more importantly, not voting is a matter of principle, of hygiene."

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On the state of the opposition

"There is no political opposition in Russia. Parties like the Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party are, in effect, sub-departments of United Russia, the ruling party.

There is only one power vertical and everyone in politics is in it: some as a back-up plan, just in case, some because they expect preferential treatment. I don't call myself an „oppositionist.,, I am just a person of common sense. No one appointed me to my post, I was chosen by the majority in competitive elections.

That is why I have more scope to act than government-backed officials. But where I can't bring change, I can share my opinion and not take part in what I oppose. There are many who think what I think, but don't dare to speak out. I know what I'm risking."

Related article: [Opposition's Roizman Drops out of Governor's Race, Calls for Election Boycott](#)

On running in mayoral elections in September

"If they held the vote tomorrow, I would run and win. But here I'm stuck in a catch-22. There is a law in the making to cancel direct mayoral elections in Yekaterinburg. If I announce my candidacy, I have no doubt this law will be immediately implemented. If I don't run, maybe they'll leave the direct vote in place. Everyone is watching each other very closely."

On what the future holds

"Society is not ready for change. Conditions in the country are worsening, but only gradually. All hope lies with the youth. They are more free, less scared and less zombied out. They don't watch television, they get their news online and many speak foreign languages. I am waiting for the moment when I can be useful and tune in.

The country is visibly changing. But for now the situation will only get worse, politically and economically. These are times which have to be sat out and survived. Then again, this is Russia we're speaking about.

We could discuss 100 different scenarios but, undoubtedly, it will be the 101st that actually comes to pass.”

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