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Russian Election Ad Maligns Gay People to Get Out the Vote

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Sobytiya Togliatti/ VKontakte

An advertisement for Russian regional elections this fall has sparked controversy by suggesting that not voting is for gay people, with a video showing two men arguing against voting before undressing each other.

A commercial ahead of the March 2018 presidential elections also played on prejudices against gay people to warn in graphic terms that not voting could lead to homosexuality. The video painted a dystopian future including a law that would force otherwise straight men to live with a "gay homestay."

In the latest ad, two young men criticize elections as "an illusion of democracy" and vow not to vote as they are seen walking through a city, sitting in a park and riding a bus.

Then the video moves into a bedroom.

"They're amoral. They think they can fool the people," one is heard saying as the two casually

undress each other.

“Let the others go and vote. We have more important things to do,” the man says as he unbuckles his belt and closes the door in front of the camera.

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The minute-long video fades to black and a date appears on the screen — Sept. 9, 2018, election day for mayor and governor posts across several Russian regions.

More than 11,500 users watched the clip on a Togliatti, Samara-based community board on Russia’s Vkontakte social network, while 1,500 viewed the ad on Facebook in less than a week.

Some rumors said the video was the work of the local governor of Samara, but no direct connection has been made to any campaign.

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny speculated that the spot may have been inspired by the homophobic presidential election ad.

“Sergei [Kiriyenko, the Kremlin’s first deputy chief of staff] must have liked how the ‘gay homestays’ were a success,” wrote Navalny in a post sharing the clip on Telegram on Monday.

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