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Russian Duma Passes Ban on Child Protesters, Navalny Claims Credit

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Vladislav Shatilo / RBC / TASS

Russian lawmakers have passed a bill that will make it illegal for children to participate in protests that have not been authorized by the authorities in a measure that critics say will be selectively used to target the opposition.

Young Russians have led the charge in anti-government protests over the past two years, drawn to the streets by opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his social-media savvy team of organizers.

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Russia's State Duma passed a bill in its third and final reading on Tuesday that imposes 15 days of jail time, fines of up to half a million rubles ($7,500) and community service for first-time offenders who organize unsanctioned rallies involving underage participants.

“The draft law is aimed at preventing the participation of minors in unauthorized rallies in order to prevent harm to their health,” reads an explanatory note to the bill.

Critics inside the Duma warned that a “very broad interpretation and application” carries risks that the authorities will “naturally, selectively apply” the new rules.

Navalny claimed credit for the youth protest ban, tweeting: “they made this law especially for me, but it’s them who should be put in jail.”

Before becoming law, the bill must be approved by the upper-house Federation Council and signed by President Vladimir Putin.

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