

Russia Outlaws Youth Protestors

December 28, 2018



Anton Sergienko / TASS

Young Russians under the age of 18 who have led nationwide anti-government rallies in recent years are now banned from attending unauthorized protests under a newly signed law.

Russia's youth has spearheaded anti-Kremlin demonstrations since early 2017, drawn to the streets by opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his social-media savvy team of organizers. Scores of lawmakers submitted measures criminalizing child protesters shortly after rallies against President Vladimir Putin's inauguration in May, where authorities were seen detaining children as young as 12.

New amendments Putin <u>signed</u> into law Thursday impose 15 days of jail and fines of up to one million rubles (\$14,400) on organizers who "involve minors" in unauthorized rallies.

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The State Duma, which passed the child-protestors bill on Dec. 18, explained that minors need to be kept away from demonstrations "to prevent harm to their health."

The Kremlin has regularly <u>accused</u> Navalny of "misleading" children, including with promises of cash payments, to take part in his protests.

Critics inside the Duma have <u>warned</u> that the law's "very broad interpretation and application" carries risks that the authorities will "selectively" apply the new rules.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/12/28/russia-outlaws-youth-protestors-a63996