

YouTube Accused of Bias for Blocking Navalny's Anti-Kremlin Voting Strategy

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Navalny and his allies plan to use his “Smart Voting” strategy to unseat pro-Putin ruling party incumbents in this fall’s key parliamentary elections. **Screenshot YouTube**

YouTube has briefly restricted access to a leading Russian independent media outlet’s account and warned others for linking to the website of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny’s anti-Kremlin voting project.

Navalny and his allies plan to use his “Smart Voting” strategy — which was first deployed in 2018 after authorities barred him and nearly all of his allies from the ballot — to unseat pro-Kremlin ruling party incumbents in this fall’s key parliamentary elections. A Moscow court blocked the “Smart Voting” website that year after ruling that it processes users’ personal data without consent.

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The independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper said Thursday that YouTube [suspended](#) it from

uploading videos and streaming live following a user's complaint about the "Smart Voting" link.

The independent video news website Sota.Vision also reported that YouTube [warned](#) it of similar measures and deleted the "Smart Voting" link to its 2019 livestream.

Opposition politician and local Moscow assemblyman Ilya Yashin said he received a [similar warning](#) and accused YouTube's parent company Google of becoming a "branch of Russia's state censor."

All three said later Thursday that YouTube apologized and withdrew its claims.

"Sometimes we make mistakes," Novaya quoted YouTube's message as saying.

The mix-up comes amid increasing pressure on foreign tech giants and social media platforms as Russia attempts to establish tighter controls on the internet within its borders.

Russia has levied multimillion-ruble fines against social media platforms like TikTok, Twitter and Facebook over content promoting this January's pro-Navalny protests and alleged refusals to take down posts containing banned content.

Last month, Russia's anti-monopoly watchdog launched a probe against YouTube for what it called abuse of its market dominance and bias toward comment moderation. Lawmakers previously passed a law allowing the authorities to block platforms like YouTube if they are found to have censored Russian-made content.

President Vladimir Putin has [accused](#) tech giants of competing with states because of their growing influence.

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