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Navalny Ally Lyubov Sobol Drops Out of Duma Race After Russia's 'Extremist' Ban

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Lyubov Sobol is virtually the only prominent opposition figure not behind bars after other Navalny associates fled the country or were jailed. **Pavel Golovkin / AP / TASS**

Lyubov Sobol, a top ally of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, announced her withdrawal from this fall's parliamentary elections Monday after lawmakers banned his associates from running for office.

Sobol, 33, linked her decision to a recent court ruling that branded Navalny's network "extremist" that came alongside a newly passed law that bars anyone affiliated with the network from the ballot. Both actions allow candidates from the pro-Kremlin United Russia party to run virtually unopposed, despite low approval ratings, in the State Duma elections this September.

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“My popularity infuriates the authorities,” Sobol wrote in a Facebook post announcing her exit from the race.

“That’s exactly why United Russia and Putin passed a law prohibiting me from participating in elections,” she said. “It’s often referred to as ‘the law against Sobol’.”

Sobol attached the results of a survey conducted in her central Moscow district, which compared her double-digit approval ratings with single digits for high-profile United Russia lawmakers, including Russia’s parliament speaker.

Sobol’s announcement also follows a leaked private surveillance video that she described as part of a “dirty PR war” earlier this month.

“Russian television smears me, I’m constantly clobbered by criminal cases, raids, *kompromat* and hitjob articles about my family, as well as house arrests, police visits, a criminal record, multimillion-ruble lawsuits, misdemeanor cases and detentions,” Sobol wrote.

“They’re crushing me in literally every possible way. But the people still support me.”

Sobol and other Navalny allies were previously barred by authorities from running for Moscow’s city council in 2019, triggering a series of opposition rallies that led to mass arrests and jail sentences.

A number of Navalny associates have fled the country or been jailed on various charges, leaving Sobol as virtually the only prominent opposition figure not behind bars.

Sobol and other key allies still in Russia are under close law enforcement supervision, some under house arrest.

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