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More Russians Barred from Elections Today Than in Soviet Union – Research

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"The real goal of the latest amendments is ... to filter out candidates who are not acceptable to the current government," Golos said. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

More Russians are legally deprived of the right to run for office today than they were during the Soviet period, according to newly published research by the Golos independent election monitor.

Golos estimates that at least 9 million Russians, or 8% of the population, have been stripped of so-called "passive suffrage" even before Russian lawmakers tightened election laws in recent months and shut out members of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's movement.

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"Formally existing electoral legislation is already more repressive than Soviet laws in terms of grounds to deprive passive suffrage and the number of persons affected by these restrictions," Golos said Tuesday.

“The real goal of the latest amendments is not to protect the sovereignty of the people as a source of power, but to limit them as much as possible, to filter out candidates who are not acceptable to the current government.”

Golos estimated that, in 2020 alone, lawmakers adopted around 50 criminal laws disenfranchising potential candidates. It added that this year’s law banning anyone affiliated with “extremist” groups from running in parliamentary elections will disenfranchise “hundreds of thousands more politically active citizens.”

“This [year] is the fourth wave of attacks on the electoral rights of citizens since the collapse of the U.S.S.R.,” Golos said, citing 2006-07, 2012-14 and 2020 as the dates of the first three.

A Moscow court branded Navalny’s activist and political network “extremist” after President Vladimir Putin signed the election bans into law earlier in June. The move is widely seen as an attempt to clear the field of opponents ahead of parliamentary elections in September at a time when the pro-Putin ruling party suffers from historically low approval ratings.

Golos’ research published Tuesday names the roughly 6 million dual nationals and those with foreign residence permits as the largest disenfranchised group.

They are followed by 1.1 million people convicted of theft and more than 300,000 convicted of drug offenses, according to Golos.

Politically active citizens are more likely to be targeted under Russia’s “extremism” laws, with more than 4,000 convicted for administrative offenses for 2020 alone and some 3,400 for criminal offenses in the past decade, Golos said.

The monitor added that around 10,000 people who have been charged with participating in unauthorized protests risk being banned from running for office if they are found guilty of repeating that offense and face criminal prosecution.

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