

St. Petersburg Opposition Leader Battles 2 Namesakes in Upcoming Elections – Reports

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Boris Vishnevsky. **Alex Brusser / Facebook**

St. Petersburg residents will be faced with a unique choice when they head to the polls in this fall's elections: Which of the three Boris Vishnevskys should get their vote?

The Russian city's most vocal opposition politician is running for both the local legislative assembly and federal parliament in September, and authorities appear to be adopting the tried-and-true method of fielding [“spoiler” candidates](#) to trick voters into splitting the protest vote.

Two months after Boris Vishnevsky announced his plans, the Fontanka.ru news website [reported](#) Saturday that two more “Boris Vishnevskys” have now filed to run for the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly. One of them is also reportedly [running](#) for the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament.

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The only way to tell the difference between the three Vishnevskys is by their age and patronymic, the latter of which is typically listed on the ballot.

The namesake candidates are a throwback to a political tactic that was first used against Sergei Mironov, who chairs one of three “systemic opposition” parties in the Duma, in the late 1990s, according to Fontanka.

The independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper said it [traced](#) the two spoiler candidates to persons who may have changed their last names to Vishnevsky. Both men refused to speak with Novaya Gazeta's reporter when reached by phone and did not answer questions sent to them on social media, the newspaper reported.

The original Vishnevsky has linked the tactic to his popularity with the St. Petersburg electorate and expressed confidence in voters’ ability to tell him apart from the spoilers.

“In my opinion, they’re giving me quite good publicity,” Vishnevsky, 65, told Fontanka.

Vishnevsky added that the registration of two namesake candidates by the St. Petersburg election commission “is a high assessment of my record.”

“I’ll explain where the real one is and where the fakes are.”

The pro-Kremlin United Russia party, whose approval ratings are at an all-time low due to stagnating real incomes, unpopular measures like pension reforms, is seeking to hang onto its supermajority in the Duma when Russians head to the polls in September.

Observers say a recent wave of police raids and detentions of opposition figures, as well as tightened election laws that shut out allies of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, are an attempt to clear the field of United Russia’s opponents.

Vishnevsky, a member of the liberal Yabloko party, has previously faced what appeared to be a coordinated [smear campaign](#) by the notorious pro-Kremlin “troll factory” accusing him of sexually harassing his university students.

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