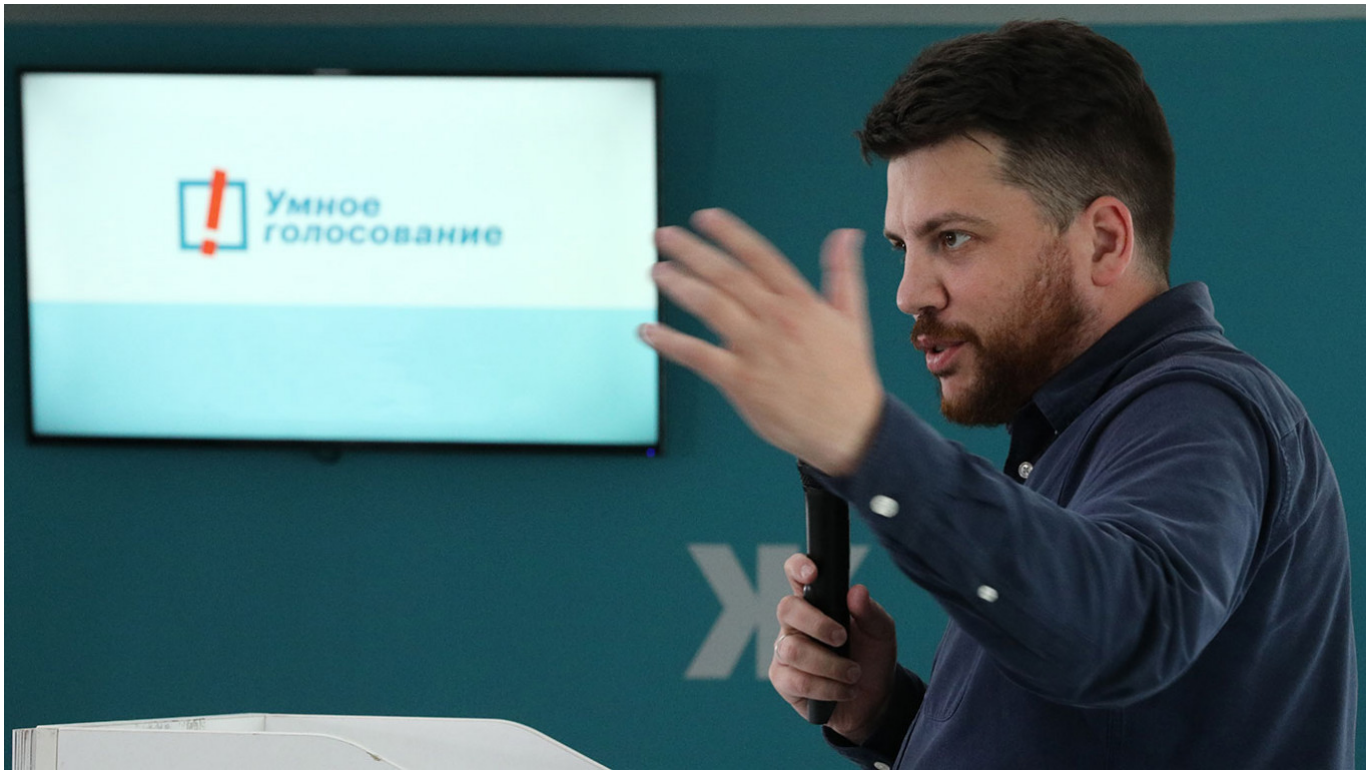
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Russia Blocks Navalny Voting Strategy Website Ahead of Election

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Leonid Volkov headed Navalny's regional headquarters network before it was disbanded due to being labeled "extremist." **Eugene Razumny / Vedomosti / TASS**

Russian authorities have blocked a website that promotes jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's anti-ruling party voting strategy in this month's parliamentary elections.

Senior Navalny aide Leonid Volkov said state internet regulator Roskomnadzor started blocking the website for the "Smart Voting" strategy that seeks to unseat pro-Kremlin ruling party incumbents by rallying support behind their most promising challengers in the Sept. 17-19 vote.

In a statement to AFP, state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor said that access to the website votesmart.appspot.com had been blocked in Russia "because it is being used to continue the work... of an extremist organization."

Related article: Russia Orders Apple, Google to Remove Navalny App

Volkov said that the website had been “the last of the sites of Navalny's team that were not blocked in Russia.”

Roskomnadzor barred 49 websites linked to Navalny earlier this summer and has ordered social media platforms, YouTube, Apple and Google to remove Navalny-linked accounts and apps from their platforms.

Kremlin critics say the blockages are part of what they call a widening crackdown on dissent and independent voices ahead of the local and federal elections.

Over the weekend, Russian media reported that a Moscow court banned Google and Yandex from displaying search results for the phrase “Smart Voting,” while a social media bot appeared in southern Russia mimicking “Smart Voting” under a similar title.

Volkov urged supporters to download the team’s “Smart Voting” app, which is expected to release a list of the candidates it supports closer to the election date.

“Get ready for a real battle for freedom of receiving and distributing information,” Volkov wrote on social media.

“[Russian authorities] really dream of one thing — that people do not hear our recommendations for a consolidated protest vote. We can win this fight,” Volkov added.

Navalny and his movement — the country's most vociferous grassroots anti-Kremlin force — are facing an increasingly bleak outlook within Russia.

A Moscow court designated Navalny’s organizations as “extremist” this summer, formally banning them and their activities and putting supporters at risk of criminal prosecution. Much of Navalny's political and activist infrastructure has moved abroad to avoid prosecution and raids, while several top Navalny associates have fled Russia after receiving criminal sentences on a range of charges.

Navalny himself is serving a 2.5-year prison sentence for parole violations in an old fraud case he says is trumped up. He faces up to three more years in prison after authorities filed new charges against him of "creating a nonprofit organization that infringes on the identities and rights of citizens."

AFP contributed reporting.

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