Russia Starts Blocking Google Docs After Navalny Shares Anti-Kremlin Vote Strategy – Monitor

September 16, 2021

Solen Feyissa / unsplash

Russian mobile network providers have begun blocking Google Docs after jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's team used the platform in its campaign to defeat ruling party incumbents, independent monitors said Wednesday.

The outages affected users of Russia's state-run telecommunications provider Rostelecom, as well as the mobile networks Megafon and MTS, according to GlobalCheck, a service that monitors and helps bypass blocked websites in Russia. The online privacy NGO Roskomsvoboda added that Tele2 customers were also unable to access docs.google.com.

As of Thursday morning, Google Docs was accessible to customers of all Russian telecom providers, GlobalCheck said.

"The blockage is likely related to the publication of Smart Voting lists on Google Documents," GlobalCheck [said](#) in a social media post.

Earlier Tuesday, Navalny's team published a list of election candidates it seeks to drum up support for to oust pro-Putin incumbents during this weekend's high-stakes parliamentary elections.

With nearly an entire field of independent and opposition figures barred from running, Navalny's "Smart Voting" strategy urged voters to support 1,234 candidates made up of mostly Communist Party, nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and members of other blocs that have been allowed on the ballot.

Team Navalny [published](#) the list to Github following the reports of Google Docs being blocked within Russia.

After blocking dozens of Navalny-linked websites over the summer, Russian authorities last week blocked Smart Voting, a website that Navalny's associates had described as "the last Navalny site not blocked in Russia."

Days earlier, a Moscow court banned Google and Yandex from displaying search results for the phrase "Smart Voting" and bailiffs appeared at Google's Moscow office this week to enforce the ruling.

Alexander Isavnin, a coordinator at the Roskomsvoboda internet freedom group, said the Google Docs blockage was "definitely" linked to the Smart Voting rosters appearing on the platform.

"It seems like Navalny's team caught the internet censors by surprise by using Google Docs; this was never done before," Isavnin told The Moscow Times.

"I think that by the morning, higher-up officials realized that its just not realistic to block Google Docs as a whole because it widely used in the country. It shows that often different level officials have contradicting ideas on how to fight the opposition," he said of the short-lived block, warning that the authorities could still try and block other websites and apps during the elections.

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 politically motivated. 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."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/09/16/russia-starts-blocking-google-docs-after-navalny-shares-anti-kremlin-vote-strategy-monitor-a75059