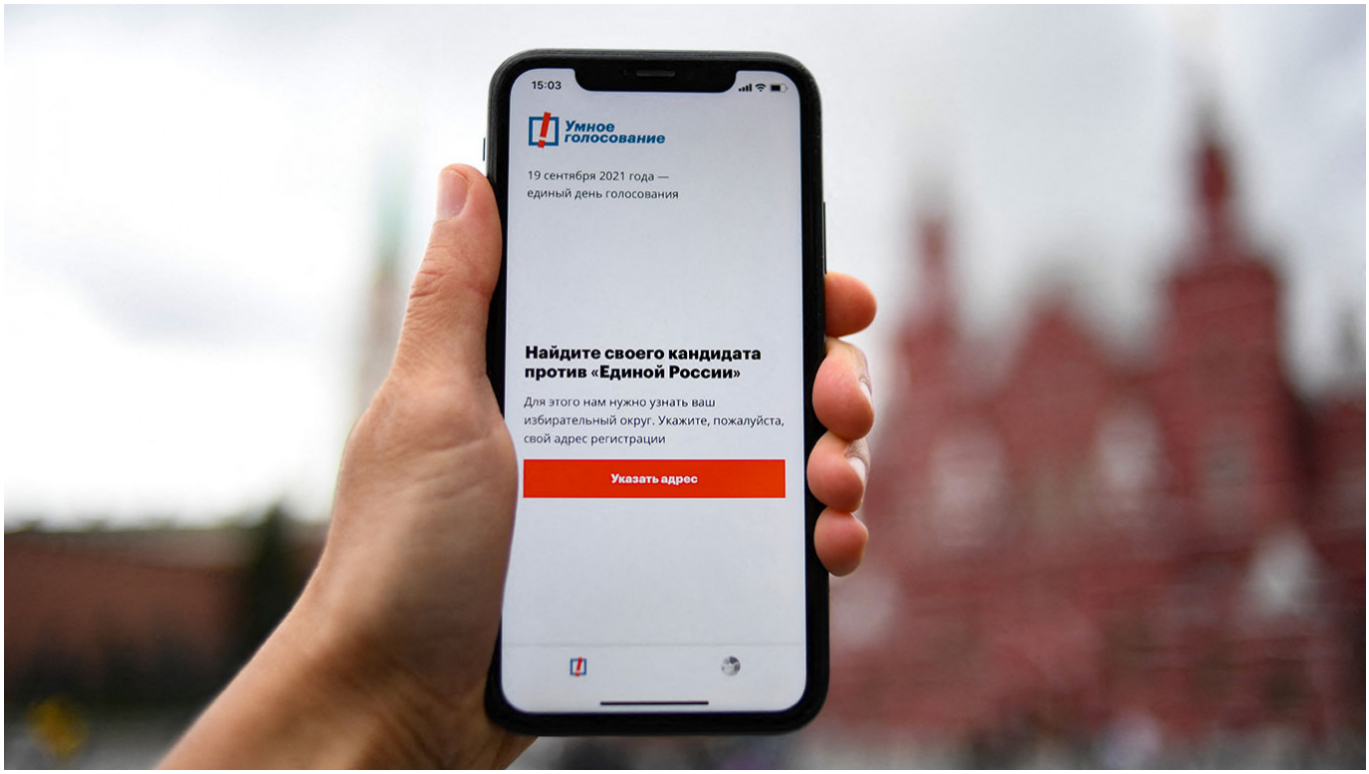
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Apple, Google Delete Navalny App on Day of Russian Parliamentary Vote

September 17, 2021



Natalia Kolesnikova / AFP

Apple and Google have deleted jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's apps from their online stores after Russian authorities threatened jail time for their employees, Navalny's aides said Friday.

The move comes as voting gets underway in parliamentary elections overshadowed by an unprecedented crackdown on the opposition.

The Navalny app contained recommendations for its supporters to cast their ballots in favor of challengers to incumbents from the pro-Putin ruling United Russia party during the Sept. 17-19 poll.

Apple has also disabled its Private Relay feature, which hides a user's IP address, within Russia, internet monitors said.

The tech giants succumbed to state pressure one month after Russia's communications

watchdog Roskomnadzor issued a takedown order, citing a Moscow court ruling that declared the opposition leader's network "extremist."

Russian have already blocked access to dozens of Navalny-linked websites and asked social media giants to block his key allies' accounts ahead of the vote for seats in the country's lower house of parliament, the State Duma.

"Removing the Navalny app from stores is a shameful act of political censorship. Russia's authoritarian government and propaganda will be thrilled," one of team Navalny's lawyers Ivan Zhdanov said on Twitter, attaching Apple's statement confirming the move.

Related article: Kremlin Praises Apple-Google Takedown of Navalny Apps

Some users reported still being able to access the Navalny app on Google Play and the App Store despite the Navalny team's announcement that it has been blocked.

The Russian senate's commission on foreign interference met with Apple and Google representatives on Thursday to warn them about criminal punishment for failing to delete the Navalny app from their platforms. The commission said it also discussed the issue with the U.S. ambassador to Moscow.

Lawmakers said afterward that they were drafting a legislative package tightening rules for tech giants.

"We're not joking," commission chairman Andrei Klimov warned. "Violation of the law can lead to administrative and even criminal liability."

Also on Thursday, team Navalny reported that its "Smart Voting" website and Telegram social media channel had come under a denial-of-service attack, disrupting access for users in Russia and abroad.

Navalny spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh slammed Google and Apple's app removals as an "exceptional act of censorship."

"It's a shame that, in the moment of confrontation between honest people and a corrupt regime, these companies played into the hands of the latter," she said.

Senior Navalny aide Leonid Volkov called the U.S. companies' decision "shameful."

"On this day a mad, frightened old man managed to get two great companies that have something to be proud of to publicly say that under certain circumstances they are ready to agree that 2+2=17," he said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/09/17/apple-google-delete-navalny-app-on-day-of-russian-parliamentary-vote-a75069