

Navalny Says Fight For Democratic Russia Is 'Long Marathon'

By [AFP](#)

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All Alexei Navalny associates were barred from running in Russia's State Duma elections. **EPA / TASS**

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Tuesday that a fight for a democratic Russia was a long game after the opposition accused authorities of voter fraud during parliamentary polls.

In a message from prison, President Vladimir Putin's top critic praised his supporters' tactical voting in an effort to weaken the ruling party but said those results had been stolen.

Last week Russia held three-day parliamentary polls that followed an unprecedented crackdown including the poisoning and imprisonment of Navalny. Pre-election polls had shown that the popularity of the dominant United Russia party was at a historic low.

But Putin's party still claimed a two-thirds majority in the lower house.

Navalny called on supporters to keep up the fight.

"We have one country no matter where we live," the 45-year-old said on his Instagram account which is being run by his team.

"And the fight for it is not a sprint but a long and hard marathon."

Navalny had called for supporters to back other candidates who could potentially defeat United Russia, most of them from the Communist Party, and results indicated that his "Smart Voting" campaign had had some impact.

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Despite claims of mass fraud, United Russia's share of the vote still went down to 49.8% from 54.2% in the last parliamentary election in 2016, while the Communists saw their support grow to 18.9% from 13.3%.

Navalny said the polls had been "stolen" and praised the "Smart Voting" campaign as a "huge success."

The main result of the current campaign, Navalny added, is that people understood that United Russia was no longer enjoying popular support and had to falsify election results to remain in power.

Claims of widespread fraud in 2011 sparked huge protests led by Navalny, who was arrested last January and jailed on old fraud charges following a poisoning with the Novichok nerve agent he blamed on the Kremlin.

On Monday evening, a few hundred people heeded a call from members of the Communist Party to gather in central Moscow to protest the election results.

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