

Russia's 'Last Liberal Party' Cuts Ties With Navalny Supporters

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Yabloko is the only officially registered party in Russia committed to liberal democracy. **Vladislav Shatilo / RBC / TASS**

Russian liberal party Yabloko [announced](#) Monday it will cut ties with members who had backed jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's anti-Kremlin voting initiative, a move that underlines bitter divisions in the country's fragmented opposition.

Yabloko, which has not been represented in Russia's parliament for the past two decades, accused Navalny of playing into the Kremlin's hands with efforts to coalesce supporters around mostly Communist Party candidates during last month's legislative polls.

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“Our opponent is not only the government, but also what can be described as modern Bolshevism,” Yabloko said in a statement.

The party defined the term as “a reaction to leadership corrupted by irremovability,” “a populist appeal to all the weak and offended” and “a call to unite around a charismatic leader who combines nationalism with primitive egalitarianism in his appeals.”

“Any vote for the Communist Party, LDPR and A Just Russia is playing a game on the side of the authorities,” it added, referring to the so-called “systemic opposition” parties that gained a handful of seats in Russia’s lower house of parliament, the State Duma.

Authorities had banned nearly every other independent and opposition member from running in September’s parliamentary elections, clearing the field for the pro-Putin United Russia party to retain its supermajority in the 450-seat Duma.

In its statement, Yabloko called support for Navalny’s “Smart Voting” initiative — which directed supporters to cast ballots for any registered candidate with the best chance of defeating United Russia members — “incompatible with membership in the party.”

Yabloko members who “ignore the party’s instructions” are subject to de-registration, the statement said.

According to the liberal-leaning Dozhd broadcaster, Yabloko’s press service said support for Navalny does not entail [automatic disqualification](#) but exclusion from future decision-making.

Founded in 1993 and an influential political player in the Yeltsin years, the party was virtually wiped out in the 2003 Duma elections as its middle-class, urban electorate rewarded Putin’s United Russia for a booming economy and political stability.

The only officially registered party in Russia committed to liberal democracy, Yabloko has enjoyed exaggerated importance as one of the last routes into politics for otherwise marginalized Kremlin critics.

Navalny made his political start with Yabloko in the late 1990s but was expelled in 2007 for attending an ultranationalist, anti-immigration demonstration and agitating against the party’s founder Grigory Yavlinsky.

Yavlinsky denounced Navalny as a “populist” in an open letter this year amid nationwide demonstrations against the opposition leader’s imprisonment.

Navalny allies have denounced Yabloko as a Kremlin front after the party refused to nominate several of his organizers — who were otherwise barred from running — for this fall’s elections.

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