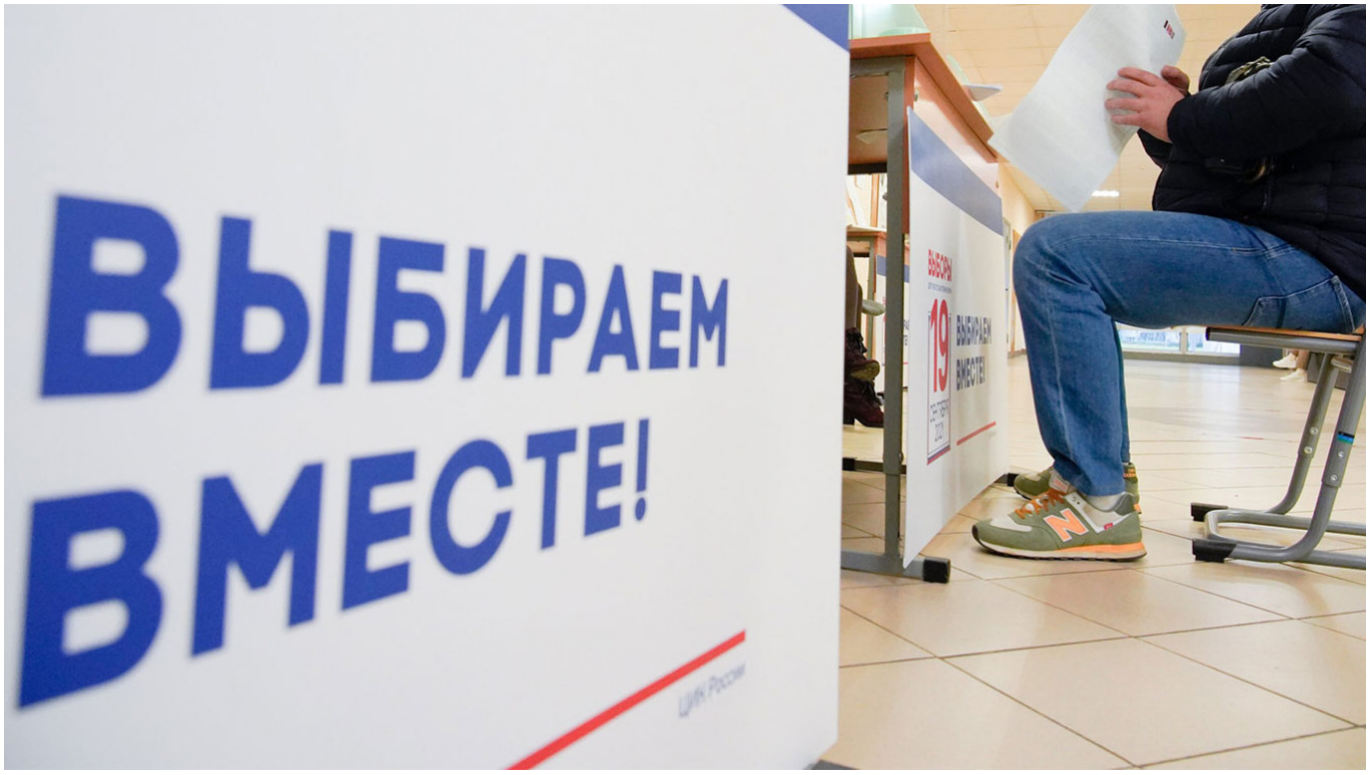
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Navalny Urges Russians to Vote Out Kremlin Candidates

By AFP

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

Jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny urged his supporters on Monday to oust Kremlin-backed candidates in next month's regional polls, calling on voters to adopt new "Smart Voting" tactics.

The mayor of Moscow and various regional governors will be up for election in September, in a contest seen by the opposition as largely rigged in favor of the ruling United Russia party.

"I believe that in the current situation, we need to take a step back and return to the strategy of voting for any candidate except for United Russia," Navalny said in a blog post Monday.

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Navalny, who recently had his jail term extended, warned he expected high levels of fraud in

the upcoming elections and that the Moscow mayoral elections had "no meaning" at all.

"Strategically, we see Smart Voting and its participants as the opposition's greatest asset and best opportunity," he said.

Smart Voting was a strategy devised by the opposition in previous elections to galvanize and coordinate support behind candidates not from the ruling party.

Since Russia launched full-scale hostilities against Ukraine last year, authorities in the country have intensified their crackdown on critical voices.

Dozens of opposition activists have fled the country, and on Friday a Russian court placed the co-chair of independent election monitoring group Golos in pre-trial detention for at least two months.

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