

Communist Firebrand Nikolai Bondarenko Arrested in Saratov Region

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Nikolai Bondarenko. [@bondarenko_blog](#) / Telegram

Law enforcement authorities in the southern Saratov region arrested Communist Party firebrand Nikolai Bondarenko on Friday, a move the politician slammed as an attempt to bar him from running in parliamentary elections next month.

Bondarenko, a former Saratov regional lawmaker who is now running for a seat in the lower-house State Duma, [confirmed](#) his arrest on his blog.

He told journalists that police are threatening to charge him for publicly displaying Nazi symbols, an offense that, if found guilty, would automatically bar him from running in the September elections.

“Ten police officers detained me at my home,” Bondarenko [told](#) news outlet Ostorozhno Novosti. “This is connected to my political activity, and it’s an attempt to pressure both the Communist Party and me, and to ‘adjust,’ so to speak, the results of the upcoming elections.”

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov [said](#) he was aware of Bondarenko's arrest and that party lawyers are "getting things sorted."

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Bondarenko rose to national fame through his fiery, unfiltered attacks against Russia's deeply unpopular 2018 pension reforms.

During his tenure in the Saratov regional assembly from 2017 to 2021, he built a large social media following through theatrical political stunts, including a [viral experiment](#) where he tried to survive on a monthly pension of 3,500 rubles (\$52).

His populist rhetoric, savvy use of social media and diatribes against the ruling United Russia party earned him high praise from late opposition activist Alexei Navalny, who once [dubbed](#) Bondarenko his "favorite" regional lawmaker.

Bondarenko was stripped of his seat in the Saratov regional assembly in 2022 after state prosecutors [claimed](#) he failed to declare ad revenues and user donations generated through his popular YouTube channel.

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