

Protecting the Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Democratic Institutions in Russia

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Freedom House condemns the systemic, illegal, and violent crackdown on the freedom of assembly taking place before our eyes around the recent municipal elections, and the complete disregard of the spirit and the procedural guarantees of free and fair elections in the Russian Federation. The violent and unlawful response by the authorities targeting independent candidates who attempted to run for the Moscow City Duma and their supporters demonstrates blatant assault on already precarious democratic institutions in Russia and the ability of individuals to collectively, peacefully voice their concerns.

The Russian government has been steadily removing dissenting voices from public life. Brutal and illegal retribution for standing up and challenging the status-quo in Russia has resulted in an election firmly tilted towards candidates loyal to the ruling party, United Russia, and the incumbent city government, leaving a wake of imprisonment, police brutality, and unacceptable contraventions of the electoral framework.

Dozens of independent candidates fulfilled the requirements to register the candidacy in the September 8 Moscow City Duma elections, with each candidate [gathering at least 4,500 verifiable signatures](#) from supporters in their district, a feat previously thought impossible to overcome by the authorities. Though candidates were successful and obtained the required number of signatures, the Moscow Election Commission nullified the signatures of thousands of Muscovites and removed around 30 [opposition candidates](#) from appearing on the ballot, sparking mass outrage, including among those who had verified their signatures. Demanding justice, people took the streets starting July 14, 2019.

Over the course of the summer, peaceful protests grew in number. On August 10, [nearly 60,000 people](#) marched in support of the removed candidates. Russian authorities responded by arresting thousands of protestors; [1,127 detentions](#) were made at the July 27 rally alone. Furthermore, Russian authorities illegally detained a number of prominent independent candidates, such as Ilya Yashin, who was [jailed for 42 days](#)—12 days in excess of the maximum [allowed](#) detention period under Russian criminal procedural rules. Candidates were routinely harassed. Nine individuals have been identified as political prisoners by the Russian human rights watchdog, *Memorial*, and three received multi-year jail sentences.

Freedom House urges **OSCE institutions and participating States** to hold the Russian government responsible for its systemic crackdown on peaceful candidates, jailing of protestors and independent candidates, and the blatant violation of the Russian citizens' rights to peaceful assembly and free speech.

OSCE institutions, missions, and participating States should continue to offer assistance to the Russian Federation in reviewing its regulatory and procedural frameworks to ensure free and fair elections for all and to guarantee Russian citizens' right to peaceful assembly.

Freedom House calls on **the Russian government** to:

- Immediately release and exonerate Konstantin Kotov, Kirill Zhukov, Yevgeny Kovalenko, Vladislav Sinitsa, Ivan Podkopaev, and Danil Beglets, who were hastily convicted to years of imprisonment without due process.
- Immediately release and cease prosecution of Aidar Gybaidulin, Egor Zhukov, Aleksei Mulyalo, Samariddin Radzhabov, and Sergei Fomin.
- Publicly condemn and hold the members of the police and National Guard responsible who are guilty of using extreme violence against peaceful protestors.
- Respect the right of the Russian citizens to nominate their representatives to run for elected office and ensure equal access to the ballot for all eligible candidates.
- Implement all ODIHR recommendations in organizing and conducting free and fair elections in accordance to OSCE standards.
- Invite OSCE short-term and long-term observers to monitor elections not only national, but also regional and local elections.