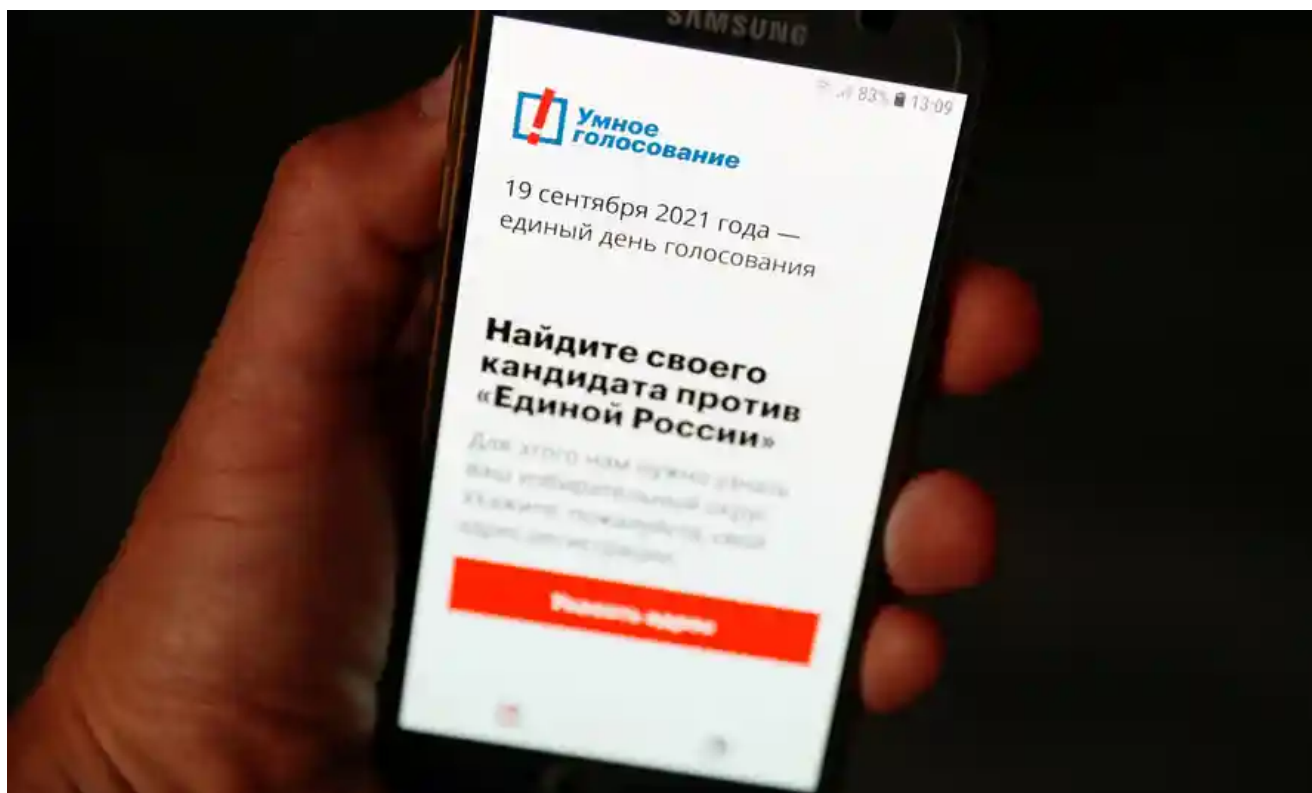


# Apple and Google accused of ‘political censorship’ over Alexei Navalny app

[theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/17/apple-and-google-accused-of-political-censorship-over-alexei-navalny-app](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/17/apple-and-google-accused-of-political-censorship-over-alexei-navalny-app)

Andrew Roth

September 17, 2021



Supporters of the jailed Russian opposition leader [Alexei Navalny](#) have accused Google and Apple of capitulating to Kremlin pressure after the two tech companies deleted his tactical voting app from their online stores.

Both companies had come under significant pressure from Russian regulators in the days before the country's parliamentary elections to block access to Navalny's Smart Voting initiative, which tries to channel opposition votes toward the strongest opponents of the ruling party, [United Russia](#).

Google and Apple were accused of election interference by Russian officials amid a larger standoff between the Kremlin and big tech over how much control Russia's authoritarian government can have over information disseminated inside the country. The Kremlin said on Friday it welcomed the apps' removal.

As [voting in the parliamentary elections began on Friday](#), the apps disappeared from both companies' Russia stores and Ivan Zhdanov, a senior adviser to Navalny, posted a letter from Apple that appeared to confirm that company's decision.

“We are writing to notify you that your application will be removed from the Russia App Store because it includes content that is illegal in Russia,” the note read. The Navalny organisation had been declared “extremist” in Russia, the note added.

Zhdanov wrote: “Removing the Navalny app from stores is a shameful act of political censorship. Russia’s authoritarian government and propaganda will be thrilled.”

He also said that Navalny’s team was considering launching a lawsuit against the tech firms. The Guardian has approached Google and [Apple](#) for comment.

A Russian court imposed fines on Google last month, as regulators demanded social media companies including Twitter and Facebook stored Russian users’ data in the country and that they deleted material banned by Russian courts and regulators. The Russian government also told Google it must remove search results related to Navalny’s Smart Voting initiative.



### Russian minister complains to US about role of ‘digital giants’ in election

Apple was also fined \$12m earlier this year for allegedly holding a monopoly position on the app market. It has challenged that decision in court.

Google and Apple were singled out for pressure for hosting Navalny’s online application before the elections. Local representatives for both companies were invited to the Federation Council, a lawmaking body, for a severe telling-off by Russian senators and regulators.

A lawmaker also said that employees of the two companies could face criminal prosecution if they ignored demands to block the Navalny application.

“Entities and persons associated with Apple and Google should realise that the knowingly unlawful actions and criminal inaction demonstrated upon receiving relevant warnings from Russian officials will invariably entail legal consequences, up to criminal prosecution,” Vladimir Dzhubarov, a member of the Federation Council, said at a commission meeting on Thursday, according to Interfax.

The US ambassador was summoned to the foreign ministry for a similar scolding. The Russian government’s accusations of US interference in the elections appears to intentionally mirror similar investigations in the US.

“The Russian side possesses irrefutable evidence of the violation of the Russian laws by US ‘digital giants’” ahead of Russia’s elections, the foreign ministry wrote.

---