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СТАТЬИ

Please take me back to 2017. how Moscow pressures independent municipal deputies

Different types of elections that took place in September 2022 in Russia were far from becoming the main topic on the Russian social agenda — war in Ukraine, conscription, and referendums on the accession of the new territories were of much greater concern. Therefore, using the example of Moscow municipalities, we resolved to analyze the state's reaction to the opposition within the government agencies.

Текст на русском

A council of municipal deputies is an unusual government agency. Until recently, even oppositional politicians stood a chance of getting elected to it.

Despite their limited powers, municipal deputies could typically influence problem resolution on a local level — for instance, approve local budgets, accept counter-corruption measures, meet with residents, and assist with their requests.

Moreover, candidates must collect a predetermined number of signatures from municipal deputies to run for governor or mayor. Thus, municipal deputies influence higher-level regional politics.

An independent municipal deputy is, in effect, a civil rights activist with the power to apply to a district's executive (uprava) and prefecture. Municipal deputies commonly address local problems, for example, environmental issues such as separate waste collection or radioactive waste removal, and social problems such as hospital shutdowns. In Moscow, municipal deputies frequently act as catalysts in the local protest. For instance, many of them participated in **rallies against renovation** and took a stance against **paid parking, urban green-space infill development**, road interchanges, and new subway lines construction.

The 2017 Moscow municipal elections were, perhaps, the most successful for the Russian opposition in the last decade. Independent municipal deputies were elected in 62 out of 125 districts, while candidates from United Russia lost the elections in **eight** districts. Oppositional politicians gained the majority in 24 districts. Yabloko party **received** 11,7% of votes and became the number two party right after the ruling party, which received 76,93% of votes. Candidates from the Communist party of Russia, A Just Russia — For Truth, Party of Growth, PARNAS, and independent candidates also managed to become members of the deputy councils.

That success was largely possible thanks to support to independent candidates provided by the «United Democrats» project **«Political Uber»** created by Maxim Kats and Dmitry Gudkov. The platform significantly simplified the

registration process, sparing candidates the necessity of diving into the legal intricacies and assisting in preparing and distributing the campaign materials.

Political Uber worked with 1046 candidates, of which 267 were elected, approximately 17,7% of all elected deputies in Moscow (1502 total). Another eight independent deputies were elected in 2016 in the Schukino district; however, we disregarded them in our statistics.

Even though the above results were insufficient to enable an opposition candidate to overcome the «municipal filter» and enter the run for the post of the Moscow mayor, the 2017 elections **caused** «somewhat of a panic» in the mayor's office. «Our victory was incomplete. However, it is still a victory, » **wrote** Mr. Gudkov.

Among independent candidates who received support from «Political Uber» were many prominent public figures such as Ilya Yashin, Ilya Azar, Lyusya Shtein, Yulia Galyamina, Konstantin Yankaskas, Alexei Gorinov, and many others.

OVD-Info set out to research how the authorities' attitude towards municipal deputies changed since 2017, which repressions municipal deputies encountered and how it affected their subsequent political careers. As our sample, we used a list of 267 deputies elected thanks to the United democrats. Furthermore, we conducted data analysis of all 1502 deputies who ran for Moscow municipal councils to determine how selective the state's reaction was.

The pressure on municipal deputies was growing as repressions worsened in the country. While five years ago, the main grounds for the persecution were rally-related, following the recognition of Alexei Navalny's network as extremists in 2022, a new option for prosecution appeared. Now candidates became exposed to accusations based on article 20.3 of the Code on Administrative Offenses, demonstrating Nazi and extremist symbols. Hence,

reference to the «Smart elections» system, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, and posts on participation in actions supporting Navalny became grounds for prosecution.

A conviction, based on article 20.3 of the Code on Administrative Offenses, strips candidates of the right to run for office for a year. Therefore, many could not register or lost their candidate status after the registration. Moreover, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many independent deputies were prosecuted based on article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses on discrediting the Russian army. Municipal deputies did not escape persecution for spreading «fakes» about the Russian armed forces (article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of Russia). For instance, Ilya Yashin, [Alexey Gorinov](#), and Elena Kotenochkina, members of Kasnoselsky municipality, have all fallen victim to such persecution.

We used open sources such as municipalities' websites and the [United democrats' portal](#) containing election results for initial data collection. Data collection on the deputies' activities, state sanctions imposed against them, and their participation in the recent elections involved studying news portals, the Moscow City Court's website, and accounts in social media. In addition to the above, we conducted a survey of 55 deputies.

To determine whether a municipal deputy was going to participate in the 2022 elections, we used information from their social networks, as well as from news sites and official sources, including election commission websites.

When calculating administrative and criminal cases, we tried to take into account only those that, according to our assessment, could be related to the performance of official duties of a deputy, political position, or protest participation.

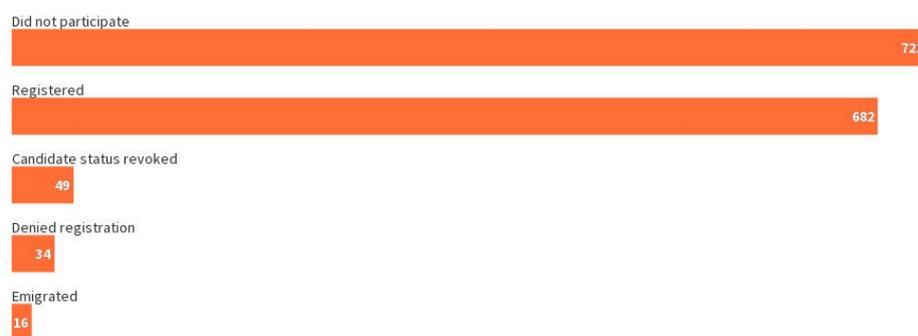
The study showed that the state is trying to eliminate independent actors at the municipal level, but the nature

of the persecution can be called selective. Some independent deputies did not face repression and even managed to be re-elected. Nevertheless, many experienced various kinds of pressure. At the same time, we could not find a single deputy from the «party of power» who was persecuted in connection to their political activities.

In September 2022, the term of powers of the deputies elected in 2017 expired. Independent candidates failed to repeat the previous success. The elections were held in 124 districts. However, according to the vote results, the opposition forces gained a majority in only one district in one municipality. In another, they have a blocking package — that is, the number of mandates necessary to block certain council decisions. In the rest of the councils, «United Russia» received the majority together with deputies from the «My District» project loyal to it.

Of all 1502 deputies elected in 2017, 48% did not run again. Of the municipal deputies in power at the time, only 45% wanted to register and managed to do so.

All deputies elected in 2017 in the 2022 elections

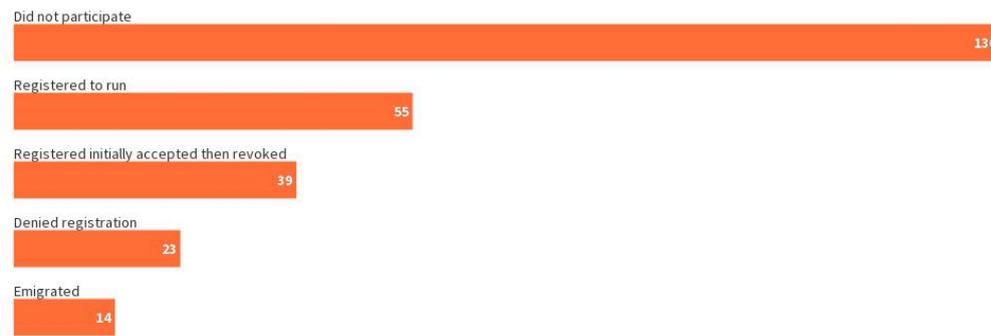


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Only 55 people from Katz-Gudkov's list registered for the new elections, while 76 could not announce their candidacy for various reasons.

All participants of Katz-Gudkov's list who became municipal deputies in 2017 in the 2022 elections



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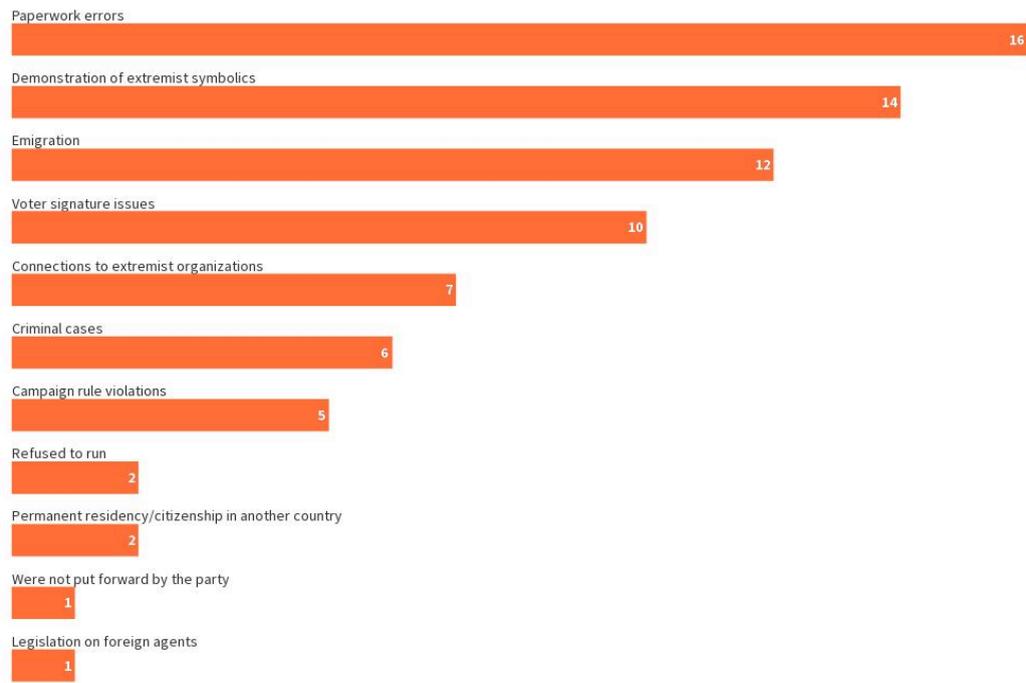
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Most often, independent deputies were denied registration due to problems with documents — admissions committees stated that they did not have all the necessary documents or found errors in the forms.

In 21 cases, the loss of the opportunity to participate in new elections was connected with an administrative case on the extremist symbolics demonstration (in many cases, the symbols of Alexei Navalny's team) or with alleged involvement in Navalny's structures. Therefore, the head of the Yakimanka district municipality, Andrei Morev, was **arrested** for 15 days because of a sticker with the «Smart Voting» logo on the car. Morev said that the sticker was stuck on his car by an unknown.

Two emigrated deputies from Katz-Gudkov's list — Lyusya Stein and Elena Kotochkinina — have been put on the federal wanted list and are included in the «Criminal case» column in the next graph. Technically, they would not be able to participate in the elections, not because of departure but because of criminal persecution.

Why the candidates from the Katz-Gudkov list could not participate in the new elections



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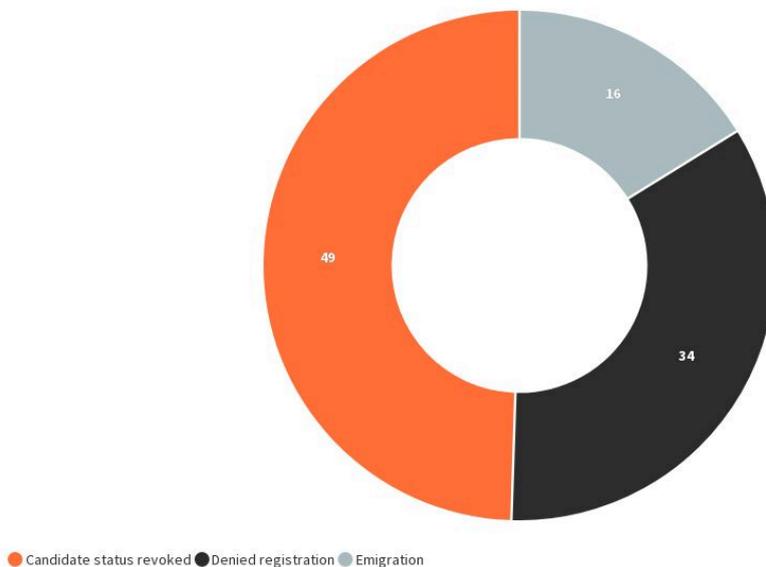
Seven candidates were deemed involved in the network of Alexei Navalny's headquarters, a recognized extremist organization. For example, Pavel Yarilin, a deputy of the Airport district of the last session, was first registered but then **removed** from the running upon the complaint of his competitor under the pretext that he participated in rallies in support of Navalny. In addition, many deputies emigrated because of the war, the inability to continue their activities, criminal persecution, or threats of criminal persecution. We believe that those who emigrated could have participated in the new elections if they had not left — many of them have publicly stated this.

In one case, a candidate for the deputy was **refused** registration based on the law on «foreign agents.» Denis Prokuronov pointed out that he was «affiliated with a person who performs the functions of a foreign agent» as he worked in the Civic Assistance Committee. Based on the law,

candidates must notify the election commission of such connections. However, the Ministry of Justice, in response to the Commission's request, replied that it had no information about Prokuronov's affiliation with any «foreign agents.» The Commission, however, deemed that the candidate's documents contained «information that does not correspond to reality» and, on this basis, refused the registration.

At least 99 municipal deputies who won the election race in the previous election cycle were planning to run for re-election but were unable to participate for one reason or another.

Of municipal deputies elected in 2017, 99 could not run again for one of the following reasons

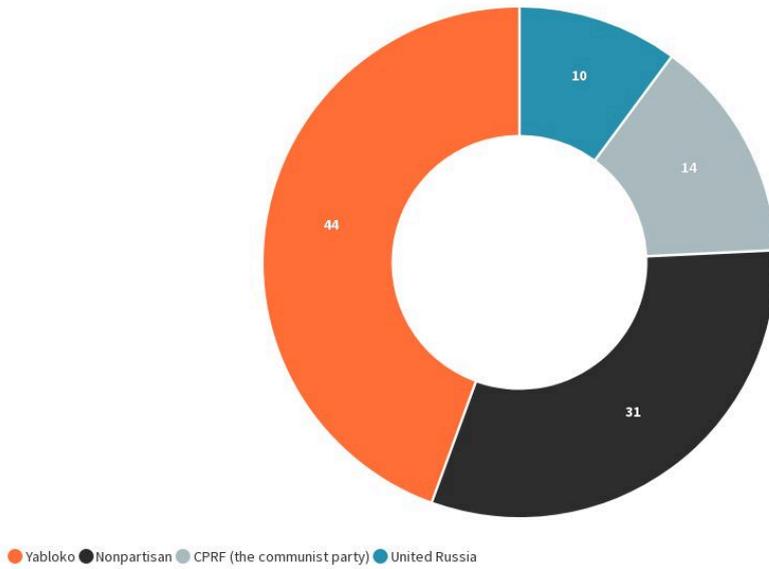


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Of 99 candidates who were unable to participate in the re-election, 11 had an affiliation with the ruling *United Russia* party, with one candidate denied registration in connection with an ongoing embezzlement investigation (article 160 of the Criminal Code of Russia).

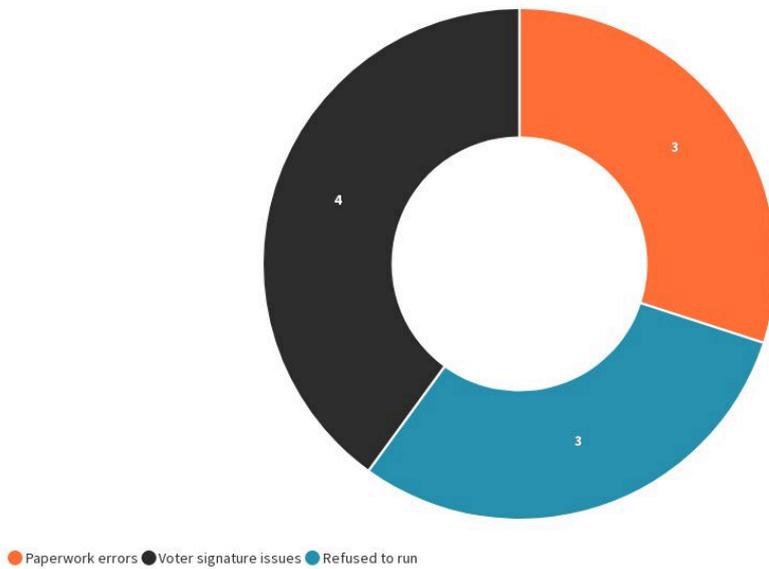
Party affiliations of the 99 council deputies unable to run in 2022



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Why some *United Russia's* candidates could not run



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We consider a candidate to be in open opposition to the government if they made public statements condemning Russia's war with Ukraine, supported Aleksei Navalny or his public initiatives, participated in mass protests in support

of Navalny, or took part in one or more of the Moscow protests of 2019. A subset of these opposition candidates is known to hold an explicit anti-war position. Only 12 of such explicitly anti-war candidates had the opportunity to run in the current election cycle.

29

openly oppositional candidates were allowed to run in the election

12

of them expressed explicit anti-war sentiment

66

oppositional candidates were unable to run in the election

39

of them expressed explicit anti-war sentiment

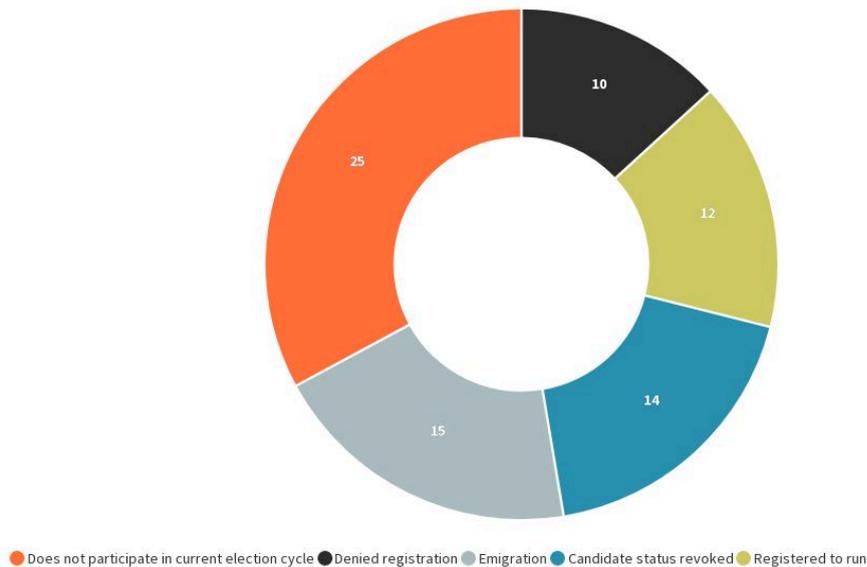
9

openly oppositional candidates won the elections in 2022

4

of the 267 nonpartisan deputies who won the race in 2017 managed to get re-elected in 2022

Municipal council deputies who publicly declared their anti-war sentiment



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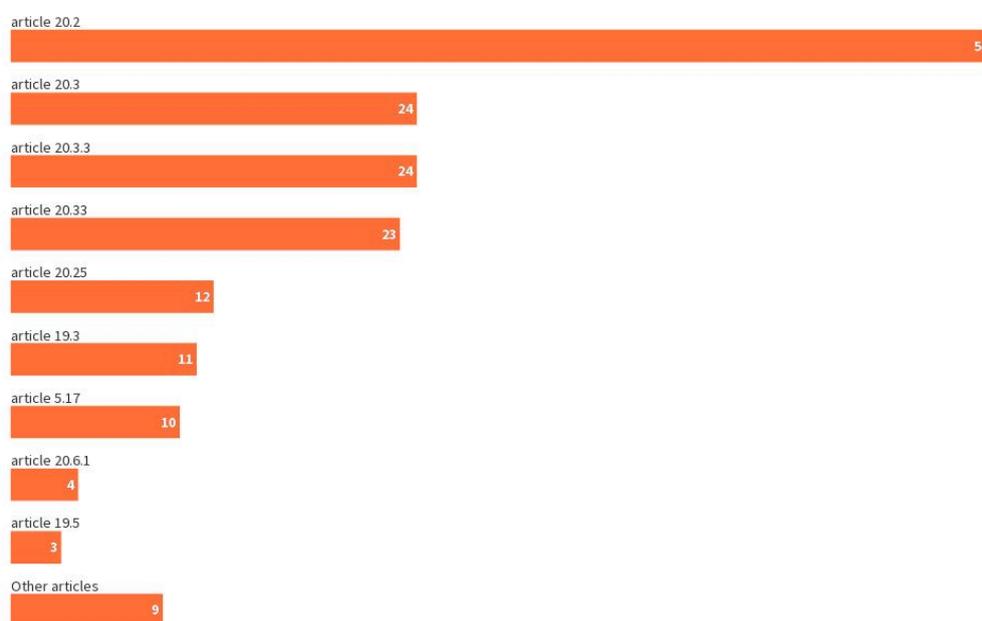
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In those cases when opposition candidates were charged with administrative liability, the most common cause was the «unsanctioned meetings» article 20.2 of the Code on Administrative Offenses. Many of the candidates were charged with multiple such offenses at once. Even though an administrative offense does not make a candidate ineligible for running, we consider this practice a form of political pressure. In the case of Yuliya Galyamina, administrative liability had grown into a criminal offense — Yuliya was charged with repeated breaches of public assembly rules under article 212.1 of the Criminal Code of Russia, dubbed «The Dadin Article» in reference to its first convict.

At least 24 candidates were banned from running for office based on using logos, banners, or symbols of an «extremist» organization (article 20.3 of the Code on Administrative Offenses). Most crime reports cited the usage of logos and symbols associated with the initiatives put forward by Alexei Navalny's team, such as Smart Voting.

Altogether we know of 52 cases of prosecution under article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses in Moscow. In this study, we included only those cases that involved candidates registered for the elections.

Articles of the Code on Administrative Offenses used against municipal deputies seeking re-election



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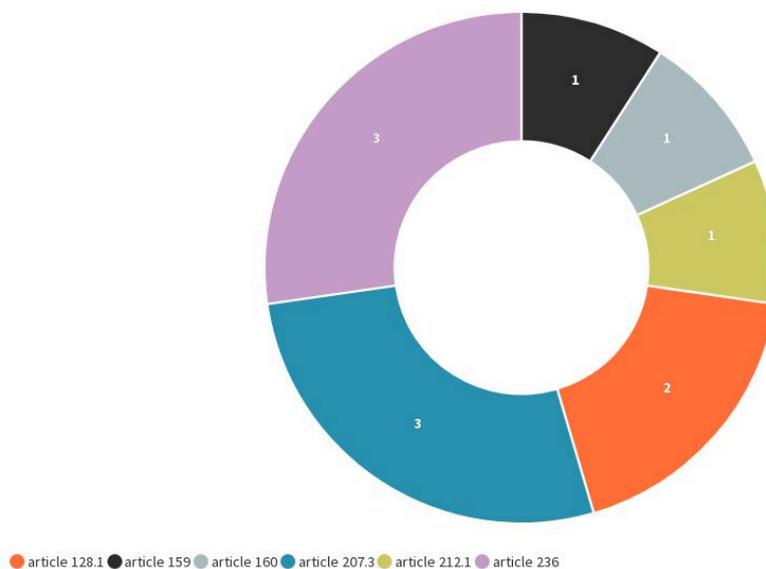
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The *criminal* charges were brought up against 11 municipal deputies, all but two of whom participated in the *United Democrats* project. Three of those who participated in the project — Dmitry Baranovsky, Lusya Shtein, and Konstantin Yankauskas — got sentenced under the infamous «**sanitary case**» where ten participants of the January 23 rallies were accused of sanitary norms violation due to being supposedly infected or having exposure to Covid. In addition, three more deputies — Elena Kotenochkina, Aleksei Gorinov, and Ilya

Yashin — were charged with spreading intentionally «fake» news about the Russian military (article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of Russia).

Curiously, the criminal **case** against Ketevan Kharaidze did not prevent her from getting re-elected to the municipal assembly. At the same time, as mentioned above, Yuliya Galyamina's **sentence** under «The Dadin Article» resulted in her elected representative mandate being revoked. She was banned entirely from running until her judgment was canceled due to the special restrictions imposed by that particular article.

Articles of the Criminal Code brought up against municipal deputies elected in 2017



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We express our deepest gratitude to each and every one of the 282 volunteers who contributed to this study.

More to read

18.02.2026 Moscow, Saint Petersburg

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