

Restrictions in Gubernatorial Elections Unconstitutional, Communists Say

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Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov **Sergei Porter**

The Communist Party this week will complain to the Constitutional Court about restrictions for candidates in the recently passed law reinstating direct gubernatorial elections, [Kommersant reported](#) Friday.

The [law](#), signed by then-President Dmitry Medvedev in May, obliges candidates to collect signatures of 5 to 10 percent of municipal deputies or municipal administration heads in at least three-quarters of the municipalities in the region.

The law also allows the president to call candidates for "consultations."

These restrictions violate several constitutional provisions, such as the people's right to directly elect candidates through free elections, said Vadim Solovyov, a Communist lawmaker in the State Duma.

With the municipal filter, gubernatorial elections "can't be considered direct anymore," Solovyov said.

The filter "legalizes actual advantages of the ruling party," meaning that "such elections can't be considered equal," Solovyov said, adding that equality is a constitutional requirement.

The first gubernatorial elections under the new law will take place in the fall in the Amur, Belgorod, Bryansk and Novgorod regions.

Before May, governors were appointed by the president and confirmed by regional legislatures, which are controlled by the ruling United Russia party. United Russia also had the right to recommend candidates to the president.

Vladimir Putin abolished direct elections of regional heads during his second term as president in late 2004, citing concern that extremists might come to power.

Before the abolition, there were no presidential or municipal filters. Party nominees and independents just needed to collect signatures from the populace or make a cash deposit with election officials.

The May law also makes it more difficult for voters to remove governors.

It demands not only a court ruling that the official violated the law but also signatures from 25 percent of the region's population to stage a referendum on the dismissal, as well as a 50 percent majority vote in the subsequent referendum to remove him.

According to the law, a governor cannot rule a region for more than two terms in a row.

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