

United Russia Candidate Loses Tolyatti Mayoral Race

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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United Russia suffered a rare setback in the industrial city of Tolyatti on Sunday when its mayoral candidate was trounced by a nonparty opponent with links to businessman and former presidential hopeful Mikhail Prokhorov.

Alexander Shakhov, former deputy police chief for the Samara region, won only 40 percent in a runoff vote, finishing a distant second behind Sergei Andreyev who took 56 percent of the vote, according to official results.

The election results come despite years of generous subsidies for Tolyatti's largest employer, carmaker AvtoVAZ, signaling deep displeasure with the ruling party that could bode poorly for incumbents elsewhere.

"It turns out that the party couldn't buy support," said Nikolai Petrov, an analyst with the Moscow Carnegie Center. "This was more a vote against the party than for Andreyev."

The government spent almost \$2 billion to bail out the carmaker in late 2009 and hundreds of millions of dollars more on a cash-for-clunkers program that largely benefited AvtoVAZ.

In spite of this, the ruling United Russia party won a dismal 39 percent in the Dec. 4 State Duma elections in the Samara region — 10 points below its national tally, according to official figures.

President-elect Vladimir Putin secured 59 percent of the March 4 [presidential vote](#) in the Samara region, slightly below his 64 percent total nationwide.

Andreyev, a former local lawmaker and regional natural resources chief, attempted to tap into widespread dissatisfaction with government mismanagement exacerbated by a struggling economy.

His slogan, "against thieves, lies and violence," could easily have been lifted from recent opposition rallies. But Vladimir Zvonovsky, head of the Fund for Social Research in Samara, warned against portraying Andreyev's win as a victory for the opposition.

Zvonovsky cited Andreyev's long history in government — which includes stints as a city and regional lawmaker and more recently as the top regional official for natural resources — as well as tacit approval for his candidacy from Samara Governor Vladimir Artyakov.

Also for some, Andreyev appears to have been a genuinely attractive candidate, especially compared to an opponent seen as old-fashioned and impersonable.

Lyudmila Kuzmina, head of the local branch of Golos, an independent vote-monitoring organization, said Andreyev was one of the rare local politicians who helped the group.

"We invited many deputies to come tour historic buildings. Andreyev was one of the very few who accepted our invitation," she said.

Kuzmina praised Andreyev as a "very strong" person, but admitted that even though he ran without party affiliation, he probably wasn't entirely independent.

"There aren't any independent politicians in Russia. The power vertical doesn't allow it," she said.

During the campaign, Andreyev battled a smear campaign focusing on his being an evangelical Christian as well as rumors that he was funded by billionaire Viktor Vekselberg or Mikhail Prokhorov, who finished third in the presidential election earlier this month.

Andreyev once co-chaired the local branch of the Right Cause party, which Prokhorov briefly headed last summer before losing his position in a bizarre party coup the metals magnate said was orchestrated by the Kremlin.

Prokhorov and Andreyev have reportedly maintained good relations, and the latter's decision to leave Right Cause in September could pave the way for a political recoupling in Prokhorov's much-touted future party.

United Russia's loss in Tolyatti comes days after a nonparty candidate defeated United

Russia's candidate in the mayoral election in the Moscow region town of Chernogolovka.

"United Russia is losing influence in the regions," said Alexei Titkov, an analyst at the Institute of Regional Politics.

"But we have to keep in mind that Tolyatti and Chernogolovka are not typical towns," he said, given the influence of AvtoVAZ in one and numerous science institutes in the other.

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