

Disputed Astrakhan Mayoral Vote Upheld

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Shein, right, drinking a cup of juice on April 12 while on hunger strike, in a goodwill gesture to the elections commission. **Dmitry Gudkov**

A judge has upheld the results of a contested mayoral election in the southern city of Astrakhan that made nationwide headlines earlier this year and appeared to show that United Russia's grip on the regions was slipping.

United Russia's Mikhail Stolyarov won the March 4 election, according to official results, but second-place finisher Oleg Shein, a veteran A Just Russia politician, said video footage from polling stations showed widespread procedural violations.

Central Elections Commission chief Vladimir Churov confirmed violations at 128 of the city's 202 polling stations, raising opposition hopes that the election would be overturned.

But on Friday, Judge Olga Morozova declined Shein's petition, all but ending hopes of a re-vote.

Shein became an opposition hero when he staged a 40-day hunger strike against the results, and opposition leaders Alexei Navalny and others rushed to Astrakhan in solidarity, marching

alongside the increasingly gaunt Shein in unprecedented protest demonstrations.

Earlier Shein said that if he failed in Russian court, he would appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

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