

# Tula's Ex-Governor Charged With Graft

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Troubles were piling up for former Tula Governor Vyacheslav Dudka on Monday as he was charged with accepting a bribe and placed under house arrest.

Cases against officials of his caliber, acting or former, are rare. An analyst said Dudka was a scapegoat in an anti-corruption campaign, and that any of Russia's other 82 regional leaders could have ended up under arrest.

Dudka was summoned Monday to the Investigative Committee's Moscow office, where he was formally charged with accepting a bribe of 40 million rubles (\$1.3 million), Interfax said. The charge carries a maximum punishment of 12 years in prison.

Investigators decided not to place Dudka in custody, citing his good record in state service and the fact that he has cooperated with them. His lawyers said they would appeal the house arrest.

Dudka denied all charges.

Dudka is accused of taking the money from the Grinn hypermarket chain, which sought to obtain land in Tula for an outlet. A former subordinate and the chain's chief executive are also under investigation in the case.

As governor, Dudka was first questioned by the Federal Security Service in March, shortly after his subordinate, Viktor Volkov, who is charged with accepting the money, told investigators that he was only a middleman who was supposed to hand the money to Dudka.

At the time, Dudka's press office said in a statement that the accusations were actually a counterattack from local officials whom the governor had targeted in his own anti-corruption campaign.

But the case proceeded, and Dudka resigned in July. He never publicly specified the reason for stepping down.

Last month, the ruling United Russia party expelled Dudka after he demanded severance pay. A golden parachute is authorized by regional legislation, but party bosses ruled that his request to collect the money "discredited" United Russia, which is struggling to combat its image as the "party of bureaucracy" ahead of State Duma elections in December.

Alexei Titkov, an analyst with the Institute for Regional Politics, said Dudka might have fallen victim to a government effort to show it is fighting corruption ahead of the Duma vote and the presidential election in March.

"They need to show that fighting graft means a lot for the authorities, and the crackdown on Dudka comes in handy here," Titkov said by telephone.

"Any governor could have been targeted. Dudka was just the unlucky one," Titkov added.

Mikhail Vinogradov, an analyst with the St. Petersburg Politics Foundation, said the charge against Dudka might also be an attempt by law enforcement agencies to show their clout to governors.

A convoluted political crisis has been simmering in Tula since last year. In March, the Tula city legislature, controlled by United Russia, sacked Mayor Alisa Tolkachyova, a move endorsed by Dudka.

Dudka, 51, in power since 2005 and reappointed by the Kremlin in 2010, has been accused by the local edition of *Moskovsky Komsomolets* of nepotism and failure to curb rising unemployment in the region.

Governors are rarely linked to corruption investigations, but cases are not unheard of. Oryol Governor Yegor Stroyev was questioned by investigators in 2009, and Volgograd Governor Nikolai Maksyuta and Arkhangelsk Governor Nikolai Kiselyov felt compelled to comment on separate corruption cases in 2007. None were charged.

The federal government was more strict in the mid-2000s, when then-President Vladimir Putin was building his "power vertical." Tver Governor Vladimir Platov was jailed in 2005 for abuse of office, and Yaroslavl Governor Anatoly Lisitsyn and Saratov Governor Dmitry Ayatskov faced separate criminal charges in 2004, although those cases were later dropped.

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