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Russia

1

CONSOLIDATED AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

/100

Democracy Percentage	1.19 /100
Democracy Score	1.07 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS

2 /100

Consolidated Authoritarian Regime

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic. See the methodology.



Author

- Margarita Zavadskaya

Score changes in 2024

- Electoral Process rating deteriorated from 1.25 to 1.00 due to an overall decrease in electoral integrity due to omnipresent fraud, the absence of genuine opposition, violence, and intimidation of voters and domestic election monitors.
- As a result, Russia's democracy score declined from 1.11 to 1.07.

Executive Summary

In 2023, the Russian government doubled down on its authoritarian tactics as the Putin regime further curtailed freedom of speech; used violence, threats, and politicized arrests and prosecutions to intimidate its enemies; and intensified propaganda in an effort to maintain the support of citizens. After two years of war in Ukraine, Russian society has become increasingly isolated and resentful, deeply influenced by anti-Western propaganda, belligerent narratives, and patriotic appeals. In this environment, civic expression remains constrained and most Russians avoid any unsanctioned political activities. ¹ The Ukraine war remained the predominant issue, despite the authorities' efforts to portray normality through regular elections and diverting citizens' attention to non-war-related matters. ² Ukrainian military incursions into the border regions of Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk persisted. These areas have endured shelling, drone assaults, and infiltrations by military units claiming to be Russians fighting on the Ukrainian side. ³

The unexpected armed mutiny led by Yevgenii Prigozhin, a former Putin ally and head of the government-funded mercenary group PMC Wagner (better known as the Wagner Group), shook Russia in 2023. During Prigozhin's "march of fairness" from Rostov-on-Don towards Moscow, at least 13 soldiers died in clashes with the Russian army. The mutiny ended after Belarusian President Aliaksandar Lukashenko brokered an agreement between the Wagner Group and the Kremlin, in which the Wagner Group agreed to end hostilities and retreated to Belarus. ⁴ A few weeks later, an airplane carrying Prigozhin and another Wagner fighter, Dmitrii Utkin, exploded, killing all on board. ⁵ Independent investigators suspect that the Russian government may have been responsible for the crash. ⁶ The

political impact of the mutiny and Prigozhin's death should not be overstated, as it did not lead to any significant intra-elite clashes or defections. Nevertheless, the mutiny was widely interpreted as a reflection of tensions and vulnerabilities within the regime. ⁷

The September elections, which spanned three days and encompassed 21 regional elections and more than 4,000 local electoral contests (including in the occupied Ukrainian territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia), ended in a landslide victory for Putin's United Russia party. ⁸

In March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague issued arrest warrants against Putin and Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for the alleged unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. ⁹ Days later, Russia reportedly opened criminal cases against ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan and three ICC judges. ¹⁰

The government continued to crack down on political opponents in 2023. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny remained in prison in torturous conditions. ¹¹ In October, all of Navalny's lawyers were arrested on bogus charges of extremism, severing Navalny's last channel of communication with his allies and supporters.

¹² In August, a court sentenced Navalny to an additional 19 years in prison on charges related to "extremist activity," extending his total prison sentence to more than 30 years. ¹³ In April, journalist and political activist Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years in prison for his opposition to the Ukraine war. ¹⁴ Left-wing sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky was arrested in July on charges of "justifying terrorism." ¹⁵ Kagarlitsky faced up to seven years in prison for 2022 Telegram posts about the 2022 attack of the Kerch Bridge in Crimea. ¹⁶ The Kremlin did not tolerate opposition from the right either: ultrapatriot Igor Girkin, who is better known by his *nom de guerre* Strelkov, faced charges of extremism. ¹⁷

Russia continued to face unprecedented international sanctions, which had a tangible but limited effect on the economy. Sanctions affected 70 percent of banking assets, revenues from fossil fuels continued to diminish, and trade declined. ¹⁸ Despite the sanctions, the Russian economy grew by 2 percent due to increased public spending, arms production. ¹⁹ The budget deficit increased dramatically. ²⁰ The country pursued "regressive import substitution"—Russian

consumers were offered outdated goods for higher prices to substitute for the lost imports. ²¹

In 2023, Russia continued its isolationist course by withdrawing from major international treaties, including the New START treaty with the US on the strategic nuclear arsenal. ²² The government also considered revoking Russia’s ratification of the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). ²³

At-A-Glance

In Russia, national governance is characterized by consolidated authoritarianism, widespread corruption among the top elites, and growing repression. The Ukraine war has isolated Russia both politically and economically and made it a pariah state. Repression has intensified, particularly through the enactment of wartime censorship laws, attacks on media outlets and legal professionals, and the strict limitation of contacts with western organizations. The September regional and local elections have been described as the most fraudulent in recent Russian history. Civil society groups operate within narrowly defined boundaries or underground, while independent media outlets have become virtually extinct within Russia, with most of them now in exile. Autonomous local government ceased to exist in 2020 after it came under the control of regional and federal bodies. The judiciary is heavily reliant on the political discretion of state authorities and politicized prosecutions have become more common.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.	1.00 / 7.00
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- The Ukraine war absorbed much of the government’s attention in 2023. To finance the protracted war, the government dedicated substantial economic resources to military endeavors. In order to prevent any domestic political dissent, the government necessitated adjustments within law enforcement agencies. ²⁴ Concurrently, the government attempted to portray political normality and reassure citizens that the government remained in full control ²⁵ . Authoritarianism persisted in the form of wartime censorship, the

enactment of stringent laws curbing political pluralism, and increased repression and violence. **26**

- The mutiny led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a former Putin ally who headed the notorious private military company the Wagner Group (which participated in the Ukraine War), undermined government stability. The mutiny commenced with the seizure of the army headquarters in Rostov-on-Don and progressed towards Moscow. This uprising emerged from a prolonged rivalry between Prigozhin and Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu as they competed for both resources and the president's favor. **27** During the march towards Moscow, clashes between Prigozhin's soldiers and the Russian army resulted in 13 casualties. **28** The march ended following negotiations mediated by Alexander Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, who persuaded the Wagner Group to abandon the mutiny and withdraw to Belarus. **29** However, within four weeks of the deal, a plane crash killed Prigozhin and another Wagner member, Dmitrii Utkin. **30** Russian officials said an onboard explosion brought down the plane. **31**
- The Russian economy faced unprecedented international sanctions, which targeted approximately 70 percent of Russia's banking assets. Fossil fuel revenues steadily declined and trade contracted. **32** However, contrary to expectations, the economy grew by 2 percent due to increased public spending and a low reference base. **33** This unexpected resilience demonstrated how international sanctions have so far failed to achieve their objectives, as the Russian economy remained afloat.
- Ukrainian incursions into the border regions of Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk persisted, characterized by shelling, drone attacks, and the infiltration of military units purporting to be Russian but allegedly fighting on the Ukrainian side. **34**
- The government continued to crack down on a wide range of opposition figures, including academics, artists, and members of radical patriotic groups. For example, left-wing sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky faced up to seven years in prison for Telegram posts about the 2022 attack on the Kerch Bridge in Crimea. **35** Ultrapatriot Igor Girkin, better known as Strelkov, faced charges of extremism. **36** Prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny remained incarcerated in harsh conditions. **37** In October, his entire legal team was arrested and accused of forming an extremist community, effectively cutting off his last means of communication with allies and

supporters. **38** In August, Navalny was handed an additional 19-year sentence on multiple charges related to “extremist activity,” extending his total prison term to over 30 years. **39** Furthermore, in April 2023, a court sentenced prominent political activist and journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years in prison for his criticism of the Ukraine war. **40**

- In March, the ICC in the Hague issued arrest warrants against President Putin and Commissioner for Children’s Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for the alleged unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. **41** In response, Russia reportedly issued arrest warrants for ICC prosecutor Karim Khan and three ICC judges. **42**
- The Kremlin adapted and optimized military and police units through the establishment of volunteer forces in collaboration with the Russian Guard, and by advocating for a new law that would allow governors to establish their own armies. **43** Additionally, the government implemented a law that introduced electronic summonses for conscripts, streamlining the conscription process. **44** Furthermore, the government worked to bolster Russia’s military capabilities and adapt to evolving security needs by increasing the age limit for compulsory military service from 27 to 30. **45**

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process.

1.00
/ 7.00

- In Russia does not meet international standards for free and fair elections. The 2023 regional and local elections were marred by omnipresent fraud, public sector employees forced to vote for the United Russia party, and the exclusion of credible opposition candidates. Electoral integrity has declined in Russia since at least 2008 and elections are often viewed as a tool to sustain Putin’s regime. From September 8-10, Russia held 41 regional elections and numerous local electoral contests, including in the annexed territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine. **46** These elections served as a test to determine whether the system could deliver results for the incumbent, ahead of the upcoming presidential election scheduled for March 2024. Gubernatorial elections were held in 21 regions, including Moscow, and there were 20 regional legislative elections,

including in the annexed territories. Additionally, 12 city council elections occurred in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Melitopol. There were more than 50 million eligible voters during these elections, representing approximately 50 percent of the Russian electorate. **47** Widespread electronic voting further reduced transparency for election observers and facilitated fraud. **48**

- In all regions except Khakassia, where the communist governor retained power, the ruling United Russia party emerged victorious, capturing more than 70 percent of the vote **49** . Moreover, United Russia also triumphed in the party lists across all regions' regional parliaments, with the exception of Khakassia, the Nenets Autonomous District, and Yaroslavl Oblast, where United Russia won in single-mandate districts. **50**
- Opposition parties performed worse than in previous elections. The Communist Party saw its support drop in most regions, despite retaining governorships in Khakassia and the Oryol region. **51** Yabloko was the only political party that ran on an antiwar platform, although it communicated its opposition cautiously. **52**
- Little information was available regarding the voting process in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Hundreds of State Duma (Russia's lower house of parliament) members, many who were not locals, were elected in these regions. Notably, despite a "passportization" campaign intended to compel citizens of the occupied territories to obtain Russian passports, residents were permitted to vote using Ukrainian documents. **53** Additionally, some polling stations faced drone attacks and closed prematurely. **54**
- Widespread reports of carousel voting, ballot box stuffing, voter coercion, and dead people in the voter rolls marred the elections. Observers characterized these elections as the worst in the past 23 years. **55**
- On the eve of the elections, authorities cracked down on Golos, Russia's most reputable election monitoring organization. Golos's co-chair, Grigory Melkonyants, was detained three weeks prior to the elections on allegations of cooperating with an "undesirable organization," the European Network of Election Monitoring Organisations. **56** If convicted, Melkonyants could face up to six years in prison. **57**
- Parties and candidates are no longer permitted to send representatives to election commissions as observers. Freelance journalists and candidates' proxies are barred from polling stations. This preventive repression also serves as a stark reminder of the risks involved in election observation. **58**

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups.

1.25
/7.00

- Civil society organizations continue to operate under intense state pressure and control. The government and its associated agencies remain the primary source of funding for the nonprofit sector, given legal restrictions on foreign funding, which is outright banned in the case of organizations deemed undesirable. ⁵⁹
- In July, the State Duma approved a bill that would prohibit collaboration with unregistered foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). ⁶⁰ The bill is in line with existing legislation on “undesirable organizations” and “foreign agents.” The proposed changes to the Code of Administrative Offenses and the Criminal Code introduce both administrative and criminal penalties. ⁶¹ Individuals participating in the activities of an unregistered foreign NGO in Russia may face fines for the first offense, with the possibility of criminal prosecution and a potential prison sentence of up to two years for three offenses within a year. ⁶² Organizing the activities of an unregistered foreign group could result in a prison term of up to three years. ⁶³ Furthermore, the bill grants authorities the power to deport foreign nationals from Russia for noncompliance. ⁶⁴
- New legislation that prohibits individuals from officially or medically altering their gender marked another significant setback for Russia’s LGBT+ community. ⁶⁵ The bill not only forbids the alteration of a person’s gender on official documents and public records, but also annuls marriages in which one spouse has undergone a gender transition. ⁶⁶ Additionally, it prohibits transgender individuals from becoming foster or adoptive parents. ⁶⁷ Russia’s crackdown on LGBT+ rights began a decade ago, with the state’s initial emphasis on “traditional family values.” ⁶⁸ In November, the Supreme Court banned LGBT+ activities as an “international public movement” and therefore extremist. ⁶⁹ This milestone decision further criminalizes and jeopardizes the LGBT+ community in Russia. ⁷⁰

- The list of undesirable organizations has been expanded to include the Central European University (CEU) and the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZoiS). **71** As of October, the number of entities categorized as undesirable has grown to 116. **72** The list of foreign agents amounts to 96 organizations, 74 media outlets, 299 persons who are acting as media outlets, 62 persons, and 22 unregistered organizations. **73**
- The Russian judicial system has increasingly employed allegations of extremism to target political opponents and exert additional pressure on the opposition. In a notable example, three lawyers from Alexei Navalny's legal team were apprehended in October for affiliating with an "extremist group." Another member of Navalny's legal team reportedly fled the country, illustrating how extremism allegations stifle dissent and hinder the legal defense of political opponents. **74**
- Several changes to the educational system helped perpetuate state propaganda in schools and universities. New high school history textbooks have been criticized for bias and distorting historical events. **75** The classes known as "Discussions of Importance" have become a primary vehicle for instilling a militaristic ideology founded on "traditional spiritual and moral values." **76** Public education authorities advocate for patriotic education through militarized extracurricular activities. **77**
- In April, President Putin approved two repressive laws. One of them increased penalties under several articles of the Criminal Code. **78** The law also banned collaboration with unregistered international NGOs and foreign government agencies. **79** The second law, "On Citizenship," permits the revocation of acquired citizenship for individuals facing criminal charges for discrediting the Russian army and collaborating with "undesirable" organizations. **80**
- The government continued to target performing artists. In November, prominent musician and antiwar activist Aleksandra Skochilenko was sentenced to seven years in a penal colony for replacing supermarket price tags with antiwar messages. **81** While detained, Skochilenko was reportedly denied her medicines for celiac disease and other health conditions in an effort to pressure her. **82** Notably, theater director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriichuk were arrested on charges of extremism, stemming from their theater production *Finist, the brave Falcon*, which explores the stories of Russian women who married Muslim men and

relocated to Syria. ⁸³ If found guilty, they could face up to five years in prison. ⁸⁴

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media.

1.00
/7.00

- The state propaganda apparatus implemented new strategies to influence and garner the support of its citizens. In addition to overtly propagandistic television programs, websites, and progovernment social media channels, Russian propagandists created fake web pages that impersonate genuine media outlets and government websites. ⁸⁵ They also employed fraudulent social media accounts in an effort to shape public opinion. ⁸⁶ The death of Prigozhin, who owned troll farms and a media empire, did not affect the scale of propaganda. ⁸⁷
- As of October, the government labeled 74 media outlets as undesirable organizations. ⁸⁸ In January, TV Rain, Meduza, and *Novaya Gazeta Europe* were added to the list. ⁸⁹ Independent journalists face prosecution both domestically and internationally. In July, prominent *Novaya Gazeta* reporter Elena Milashina, who covered a crackdown on gay men in Chechnya, was assaulted alongside lawyer Alexander Nemoev while visiting Grozny. ⁹⁰ Dissident journalists Elena Kostyuchenko (a former reporter for *Novaya Gazeta*) and Irina Babloyan (previously a journalist at the defunct radio station Ekho Moskvy) believe they were poisoned in Germany and Georgia respectively in October 2022. ⁹¹ Independent Russian media outlets largely operate in exile in Western Europe. ⁹² The regime also targets foreign journalists, particularly American reporters. As of December, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich and Radio Free Europe journalist Alsu Kurmasheva remained in Russian prisons on charges of espionage. ⁹³
- In June, the government unsuccessfully attempted to isolate its internet infrastructure from the broader global web, testing its concept of a “sovereign Internet.” ⁹⁴ In 2022, Meta, the parent company of Facebook, was designated a terrorist organization in Russia. ⁹⁵ As a result, popular mobile apps like Facebook and Instagram have been banned. ⁹⁶ They are

only accessible through virtual private networks (VPNs). ⁹⁷ However, even VPN services face frequent disruptions imposed by state regulators, further limiting access to these platforms. ⁹⁸ Telegram remains a major source of information that the state does not fully control. ⁹⁹

- Numerous media outlets and online resources face either blocking or slowdowns by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor). ¹⁰⁰ Russia pursued import substitution to replace popular international platforms like YouTube. ¹⁰¹ In September, the Russian tech company VK announced the creation of two distinct business groups. ¹⁰² The first group comprises the Mail.ru email service, the Rustore app store, VK ID, and VK Pay. ¹⁰³ The second division includes the social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, as well as platforms like Zen, VK Video, VK Music, VK Clips, and VK Messenger, all categorized as the company’s “content projects.” ¹⁰⁴ The latter group has been placed under the supervision of 29-year-old Stepan Kovalchuk, the grandnephew of the banking oligarch Yuri Kovalchuk. ¹⁰⁵
- The environment for independent media remains far from secure. Stringent censorship laws, aimed at curbing the spread of disinformation and content critical of the government, effectively restrict media outlets from openly referring to the war in Ukraine as a war and providing balanced coverage. ¹⁰⁶

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities.

1.25
/ 7.00

- Regional governments remain aligned with the Kremlin. In 2023, there were no major shifts or turnover among governors. Only four regional heads were replaced. ¹⁰⁷ In wartime, governors are charged with preventing civil unrest, monitoring public opinion, and dampening the effect of inflation and the war’s impact on the labor market. ¹⁰⁸
- Local government autonomy eroded after voters passed a constitutional referendum in 2020 which, among other major changes, formally integrated local government into the hierarchical structure of state power. ¹⁰⁹ The State Duma has also discussed a new municipal reform aimed at finalizing

the changes outlined in the 2020 constitutional amendments. ¹¹⁰

Municipalities in Russia lack financial independence, limiting their autonomy. Insufficient funds in municipal budgets are a recurring topic in government policy talks. In June, President Putin directed the cabinet to enhance municipal finances by altering tax revenue allocation methods. ¹¹¹

Municipalities have limited financial and political autonomy, but matter to both the Kremlin and the opposition. Municipalities influence regional elections via the municipal filter, eliminating unwanted candidates. Municipal councils serve as a training ground and information source for the opposition, offering exposure and access.

- In the September local elections, incumbent Sergei Sobyanin won the race for mayor of Moscow. The electronic vote played a noticeable role in the electoral outcomes. Nearly 4 million voters cast their ballots online, approximately 2.7 million in Moscow and around 1.2 million in other regions, including the occupied territories. Sobyanin captured more than 2 million electronic votes, while the runner-up received around 200,000 electronic votes ¹¹² . Electronic vote facilitates fraud. ¹¹³
- Two branches of the Yabloko party, the only political party with a pro-peace platform, managed to secure reelection in city assemblies in Yekaterinburg and Novgorod. ¹¹⁴ Other municipal election bids brought victory for the incumbent or pro-United Russia candidates. ¹¹⁵

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions.

1.00
/7.00

- Russia’s judicial system has lacked transparency and autonomy for more than a decade, rendering it vulnerable to political persecution and repression. In 2023, 723 individuals were charged in the so-called “antiwar” case. Many of the accused received unusually lengthy prison sentences. ¹¹⁶ Notably, politician and journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years in prison on charges of high treason, involvement in activities of an undesirable group, and discrediting Russia’s armed forces. ¹¹⁷

- Detained individuals endured harsh conditions. Rights groups have raised concerns about the treatment of inmates in pretrial detention centers, particularly in the case of Kaliningrad activist Igor Baryshnikov, who was sentenced to seven and a half years in a penal colony. ¹¹⁸ Baryshnikov's allies fear that the activist, who was living with cancer, would not live long enough to appeal his sentence. ¹¹⁹ Similarly, municipal deputy Alexei Gorinov, serving nearly seven years in a penal colony for his antiwar stance, has endured harsh punishments such as being sent to a punishment cell multiple times. ¹²⁰ In October, Gorinov was transferred to a prison hospital. ¹²¹ Additionally, the health of 17-year-old Yegor Balazeikin, who was sentenced to six years in prison for attempting to set fire to two military recruitment offices, continued to deteriorate in his pretrial detention center. ¹²² Balazeikin suffers from progressive liver fibrosis, which has contributed to the teen's worsening eyesight and infections in his legs due to inadequate medical care. ¹²³
- The Constitutional Court rejected challenges to the constitutionality of legislative provisions that criminalize any "public actions aimed at discrediting" the Russian Armed Forces. ¹²⁴ This decision effectively denies constitutional protection for freedom of expression, which prompted grave concerns from UN experts. ¹²⁵
- The government intensified its crackdown on independent lawyers who offer legal services to political dissidents in 2023. Notably, three lawyers from Alexei Navalny's legal team were arrested in October for belonging to an "extremist group," worsening the restrictive environment for attorneys who represent political dissidents. ¹²⁶ Numerous instances of pressure on lawyers defending individuals in politically motivated cases have been reported. In St. Petersburg, disciplinary proceedings were initiated against Yuri Novolodsky, who represented Sasha Skochilenko in the "antiwar case." ¹²⁷ Human rights lawyer Timur Idalov in Moscow faced threats after documenting an interview with former Wagner commander Andrei Medvedev, who exposed extrajudicial executions in Ukraine. Vadim Prokhorov, who represented Vladimir Kara-Murza, left Russia after being threatened with arrest and prosecution by the judge and prosecutor in Kara-Murza's trial. ¹²⁸ In Ingushetia, the court refused to disqualify lawyers appointed to represent defendants in the 2019 Magas protests case, despite the lawyers' own motion for disqualification. ¹²⁹

- Conditions for Russian political prisoners continued to deteriorate. Alexei Navalny could not be located for 20 days in 2023 after he was transferred from his previous prison to another prison in the Arctic Circle. Authorities did not notify Navalny's family or his lawyers about the move. ¹³⁰ Gorinov also disappeared for ten days after his lawyer reported that he suffered severe health issues. ¹³¹
- Reports of extrajudicial violence persisted in 2023. In September, a video emerged showing Chechen head Ramzan Kadyrov's son, Adam, assaulting a man in police custody who had been accused of burning the Quran. ¹³² Regrettably, the extrajudicial attack was disregarded by the prosecutor's office and the ombudsman. ¹³³ In June, another antiwar activist, Anatoly Beryozikov, died after being tortured in police custody in the southwestern city of Rostov-on-Don. ¹³⁴

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives.

1.00
/7.00

- The Corruption sustains Putin's regime through the distribution of economic assets to the president's allies. ¹³⁵ During the Ukraine war, maintaining access to public funds and assets for Putin's allies has become crucial to sustaining loyalty and compensating for the financial losses caused by international sanctions. Information about officials' incomes, including tax declarations, became increasingly less accessible. At the end of 2022, Putin issued a decree that exempted several categories of citizens from declaring their income and assets. ¹³⁶ Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov emphasized that this exception applied only to servicemen and employees of law enforcement agencies. ¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the decree pertains not only to the submission, but also to the publication of declarations. ¹³⁸
- Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index consistently finds high levels of corruption in Russia. Russia scored 28 points out of 100 in the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index. ¹³⁹ The Russian Prosecutor-General's Office announced in March that it had designated Transparency International an "undesirable organization." ¹⁴⁰

- Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation has released a series of investigative reports that garnered significant attention on social media. One of these investigations focused on corruption allegations surrounding Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin and his allies. Notably, Alexei Venediktov, the editor-in-chief of the Ekho Moskvy radio station, allegedly received nearly 700 million rubles (\$8 million) from Sobyenin's funds. The investigation also implicates Margarita Simonyan, Tigran Keosayan, and Ksenia Sobchak, as their respective companies also received funds from the same organization linked to Sobyenin. ¹⁴¹
- The Anti-Corruption Foundation has unveiled three prominent investigations exposing corruption, embezzlement, and undisclosed assets, including opulent three-story villas in Spain owned by United Russia officials (Morozov, Matveichev, and Kostin), propagandists (Vladimir Solovyov), and high-ranking military officials (Surovikin and Patrushev) and their families. ¹⁴² The latter have received state protection, which allows them to hide the illegal incomes of their relatives and friends. ¹⁴³ Relatives of Yevgeny Prigozhin possess a luxurious mansion in Italy valued at €3.5 million (\$3.8 million). Prigozhin's identifiable assets are estimated to be worth at least 2 trillion rubles (\$23 billion). ¹⁴⁴

AUTHOR: Margarita Zavetskaya is a senior research fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. She has extensively published in the realms of public opinion, democratization, elections, and post-election protest in Russia and beyond.

Footnotes

- ¹ Andrei Kolesnikov, "As War Rages, Russian Society Has Assumed the Fetal Position," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 February 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88938>.
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More footnotes



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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

13/100 Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

21/100 Not Free

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