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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Russian Federation has a highly centralized, authoritarian political system dominated by President Vladimir Putin. The bicameral Federal Assembly consists of a directly elected lower house (State Duma) and an appointed upper house (Federation Council), both of which lacked independence from the executive branch. The State Duma elections in 2011, the presidential election in 2012, and the regional elections during the year were marked by accusations of government interference and manipulation of the electoral process. Security forces generally reported to civilian authorities, although in some areas of the North Caucasus, especially Chechnya, civilian authorities did not maintain effective control over the security forces.

During the year the occupation and purported "annexation" of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 continued significantly and negatively to affect the human rights situation. The government continued to train, equip, and supply pro-Russian forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, who were joined by numerous fighters from Russia. International monitors and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) attributed thousands of civilian deaths and injuries, as well as widespread human rights abuses, to combined Russian-separatist forces in the Donbas region and the Russian occupation authorities in Crimea (for details see the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Ukraine). Russian law has de facto applied in Ukraine's Crimea since the occupation and purported "annexation" of the peninsula in March 2014. The government utilized the conflict to stoke nationalism and stifle dissent domestically. On February 27, opposition politician and former deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov was shot and killed near the Kremlin. Nemtsov had been preparing a report detailing the country's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. Authorities conducted politically motivated arrests, detentions, and trials of Ukrainian citizens in Russia, including the trial of Rada deputy and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe delegate Nadiya Savchenko and the conviction of filmmaker Oleh Sentsov on terrorism charges. Several Ukrainians claimed to have been tortured while in Russian custody, and at year's end numerous Ukrainian citizens remained in some form of detention in Russia as political prisoners (for details see the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Ukraine).

The most significant human rights problems during the year involved:

1. Restrictions on the Ability to Choose One's Government and Freedoms of Expression, Assembly, Association, and the Media, as well as Internet Freedom: According to the country's constitution and laws, citizens have the ability to choose their government through the right to vote in free and fair elections; however, authorities restricted this ability. The government increasingly instituted a range of measures to suppress dissent. The government passed new repressive laws and selectively employed existing ones systematically to harass, discredit, prosecute, imprison, detain, fine, and suppress individuals and organizations engaged in activities critical of the government, including NGOs, independent media outlets, bloggers, the political opposition, and activists. Individuals and organizations that professed support for the government of Ukraine or opposed the Russian government's activities in Ukraine were especially targeted.

2. Political Prosecutions and Administration of Justice: Officials denied due process to defendants in politically motivated cases, including in the prosecutions and appeals of several defendants arrested after the 2012 anti-Putin demonstrations on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow; secret detentions and convictions based on treason and espionage charges; the harsh sentencing and imprisonment of environmental activist Yevgeniy Vitishko; the convictions of non-Russian citizens taken illegally from other countries, especially Ukraine, and brought to Russia for trial; and criminal cases opened against several other political activists and human rights advocates. The government stymied and stigmatized the work of NGOs through the "foreign agents" law and adopted an "undesirable foreign organization" law targeting non-Russian NGOs. Authorities failed to bring to justice the individuals responsible for the deaths of prominent journalists, activists, whistleblowers, and opposition politicians.

3. Government Discrimination against Racial, Ethnic, Religious, and Sexual Minorities: The government continued to discriminate against and selectively prosecute lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons; members of some religious and ethnic minorities; and migrant workers. The government stoked Russian nationalism to implement its policies while stifling dissent. The law banning "propaganda" of nontraditional sexual relations to minors was increasingly used to harass members of the LGBTI community by threatening their jobs, blocking websites, and suppressing activism.

Other problems reported during the year included allegations of torture and excessive force by law enforcement officials that sometimes led to deaths, prison overcrowding as well as substandard and sometimes life-threatening prison conditions, executive branch pressure on the judiciary; electoral irregularities, extensive official corruption, violence against women, limits on the rights of women (especially in the North Caucasus), trafficking in persons, discrimination against persons with disabilities, social stigmas against persons with HIV/AIDS, and limitations on workers' rights.

The government failed to take adequate steps to prosecute or punish most officials who committed abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity.

Conflict in the North Caucasus between government forces, insurgents, Islamist militants, and criminal forces led to numerous human rights abuses, including killings, torture, physical abuse, politically motivated abductions, and a general degradation in the rule of law. The government generally did not investigate or prosecute abuses, in particular when regional authorities were responsible. Security forces in the Republic of Chechnya under the direct control of the government of Ramzan Kadyrov acted with impunity, including by issuing threats to Russian federal security forces that attempted to operate in the republic. Chechen authorities also failed to assure the safety of human rights defenders, as demonstrated by the destruction in July of the office of the NGO Committee against Torture in Grozny by a mob.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. In the North Caucasus, both authorities and local militants carried out numerous extrajudicial killings (see section 1.g.).

On February 27, opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, formerly deputy prime minister during the administration of Boris Yeltsin, was shot and killed on the streets of Moscow near the Kremlin. Police detained several suspects, including Zaur Dadayev, formerly deputy commander of the North battalion of the Interior Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Chechnya. Reports, including in the newspaper *Kommersant*, indicated that Dadayev might have held a position within the ministry at the time of the killing. Dadayev confessed to the killing before recanting, claiming he had been tortured while in detention. He implied that he had received orders for Nemtsov's killing from Ruslan Geremeev, another officer who served in the 'ministry's North battalion. In November police filed a petition in a district court in Moscow for the arrest in absentia of the alleged organizer of the killing, Ruslan Muhudinov, another former interior ministry officer. Dadayev remained in detention at year's end, while the status of Geremeev and Muhudinov was unclear. In December authorities declared Muhudinov to be the "mastermind" of the killing, but Nemtsov's family maintained that authorities exaggerated Muhudinov's role in order to hide the political motive for the killing. At the time of his death, Nemtsov was preparing a detailed report on the involvement of Russian soldiers in the conflict in Ukraine (the report, entitled *Putin. War*, was made public in May after being completed by Nemtsov's associates).

Prison officials and police subjected inmates and suspects in custody to physical abuse that in some instances resulted in death (see section 1.c., Prison and Detention Center Conditions). On September 4, police arrested musician Sergey Pestov while he was rehearsing with friends in his garage in the town of Dubna in the Moscow oblast. After being handcuffed and taken to the local police station, he fell into a coma and died on the way to the hospital the next morning. According to witnesses, police officers had struck his head several times, causing him to bleed from the nose. In October the Investigative Committee in the Moscow oblast was assigned to investigate Pestov's death. According to the local NGO, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, witness accounts and other evidence proved the police had tortured Pestov.

Physical abuse leading to death continued to be a problem in the armed forces. On July 2 in the Chelyabinsk oblast, a senior officer surnamed Zainutdinov beat Denis Ovodov, 19-year-old conscript, with an iron flask for refusing an order to clean up. Ovodov later died from his injuries. Investigators charged Zainutdinov with exceeding authority with the use of violence.

b. Disappearance

Enforced disappearances for both political and financial reasons continued in the North Caucasus (see section 1.g.). According to the 2015 report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, there were 476 outstanding cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances in the country.

Security forces were allegedly responsible for the kidnapping and disappearance of asylum seekers from Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (see section 2.d.).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the constitution prohibits such practices, numerous credible reports indicated that law enforcement personnel engaged in torture, abuse, and violence to coerce confessions from

suspects, and authorities generally did not hold officials accountable for such actions. If law enforcement officials were prosecuted, they were typically charged with simple assault or exceeding their authority. According to human rights activists, judges often elected to rule that these were cases of abuse of power rather than torture. The constitution's definition of torture implies a private crime between two or more individuals of similar rank, meaning an act of abuse committed by one private citizen against another. Courts often elected instead to utilize laws against abuse of power, because this definition, according to legal statutes, better captures the difference in authority between an officer of the law and the private individual receiving the abuse.

There were reports of deaths as a result of torture (see section 1.a.).

Physical abuse of suspects by police officers was reportedly systemic and usually occurred within the first few days of arrest. Reports from human rights groups and former police officers indicated that police most often used electric shocks, suffocation, and stretching or applying pressure to joints and ligaments, because those methods were considered less likely to leave visible marks. In the North Caucasus, local law enforcement organizations as well as federal security services reportedly committed torture (see section 1.g.).

On January 21, police summoned a woman to a station in the Moscow suburb of Mytishchi for questioning. When she refused to confess to the theft of which she was suspected, detectives placed a bag over her head and administered shocks with an electric Taser to compel an admission of guilt. A forensic examination revealed she was shocked at least 35 times. The Investigative Committee later announced that authorities detained two detectives in the case and charged them with exceeding authority with the use of violence and special methods.

Authorities reportedly physically abused foreigners taken into custody. In May 2014 authorities detained Ukrainian law student Yuriy Yatsenko in the town of Oboyan after he attempted to check into a hotel while on a business trip. Federal Security Service agents presented him with photographs documenting his alleged participation in the Maidan protests in Ukraine and told him to confess to intending to carry out terrorist attacks in Russia on behalf of the Ukrainian ultranationalist organization Right Sector. After he refused, authorities detained Yatsenko for almost a year and allegedly repeatedly tortured him in Kursk Oblast. According to Yatsenko's account, authorities beat him with a bag over his head while suspended from a tree, deprived him of food and sleep, and threatened him with injections. Authorities finally allowed Yatsenko to see a lawyer after he cut himself and threatened to commit suicide. Authorities subsequently released Yatsenko in May.

Authorities reportedly tortured defendants and witnesses involved in high-profile trials. In the case of the killing of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, suspect Zaur Dadayev confessed to the killing but later stated he had done so under duress. Andrey Babushkin, a member of the Public Monitoring Commission and Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, stated there was evidence of torture on the bodies of Dadayev and another suspect. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation threatened criminal charges against Babushkin for his statements.

Court decisions related to police torture continued to come from the Republic of Tatarstan. On February 4, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan upheld the sentences of eight officers convicted following the 2012 death of Tatarstan resident Sergey Nazarov, who was severely beaten and raped at the Dal'niy police station. Courts also sentenced Tatarstan police officers in more recent cases of alleged torture of detainees. In July the Aktanysh District Court sentenced Major Rustam Gabdrashitov to three years' imprisonment, and Captain Radik Gabdrashitov and Senior Lieutenant Ramil Sadrtidinov to three-year suspended sentences for the unlawful use of physical

force. In September 2014 the officers attempted to force a confession from a 24-year-old man taken to the Aktanysh police station for questioning. The officers allegedly kicked, punched, and stood on the victim's head. In addition to the court's sentence, authorities disciplined the police chief and four of his subordinates.

Police, as well as individuals operating with the tacit approval of authorities, conducted attacks on political and human rights activists, critics of government policies, and persons linked to the opposition. On February 4, a group of men attacked defense lawyer Murad Magomedov outside the Supreme Court of Dagestan during a trial in which he had been defending Akhmed Israpilov on terrorism charges. Magomedov suffered a broken jaw and head injuries. Human Rights Watch reported that the brazenness of the assault indicated the assailants likely acted with the acquiescence of authorities. Magomedov had also worked with Memorial Human Rights Center's Dagestan office to defend the rights of residents of Vremennyy who had been forced from their homes due to a counterterrorism operation. No information was available regarding any investigation into the identity of the attackers.

On December 11, journalist, politician, and public figure Vladimir Kara-Murza, Jr. submitted a request to the Investigative Committee to open a criminal investigation into what he characterized as an attempt to kill him by poisoning, alleging the attempt on his life was motivated by political and ideological hatred. Kara-Murza was hospitalized on May 26 after suffering from an unknown illness and spent more than a month in a Moscow hospital before his condition stabilized sufficiently for him to travel abroad to seek further treatment. In his complaint Kara-Murza provided test results conducted by a foreign clinical center.

Reports by refugees, NGOs, and the press suggested a pattern of police carrying out beatings, arrests, and extortion of persons whose ethnic makeup was assumed to be Romani, Central Asian, African, or of a Caucasus nationality.

There were multiple reports of authorities' detaining defendants for psychiatric evaluations for up to 30 days as a means of pressuring them. According to the Russian Legal Information Agency, a court ruling in March moved the leader of the nationalist organization Russians, Aleksandr Potkin (also known as Aleksandr Belov), from a pretrial detention facility to a mental hospital. Police arrested Potkin in October 2014 in Moscow on suspicion of embezzlement of five billion dollars from BTA Bank. Potkin's lawyers claimed the authorities were prosecuting him for political reasons. In September authorities charged Potkin with inciting hatred or enmity, creating an extremist organization, encouraging extremism, and money laundering.

Nonlethal physical abuse and hazing continued to be a problem in the armed forces, although the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation reported in February that the number of violations related to hazing in the armed forces decreased by 16 percent in 2014. The NGO Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers confirmed the decrease of incidents of "dedovshchina" (a pattern of hazing), noting that the organization received such complaints at a rate of less than 400 per year.

In March the St. Petersburg City Court found that military commissioners violated recruits' rights by not taking into account their medical files. This caused recruits who were medically unfit for duty to enter into the army. Of the more than 20,000 complaints the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers received annually, approximately 80 percent were from conscripts who were drafted into service despite claiming poor health.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in prisons and detention centers varied but were sometimes harsh and life threatening. Overcrowding, abuse by guards and inmates, limited access to health care, food shortages, and inadequate sanitation were common in prisons, penal colonies, and other detention facilities.

Physical Conditions: Authorities held prisoners and detainees in five types of facilities: temporary police detention centers, pretrial detention facilities (SIZO), correctional labor colonies (ITKs), prisons for those who violate ITK rules, and educational labor colonies for juveniles. Unofficial prisons, many of which were located in the North Caucasus district, reportedly continued to operate.

Prison overcrowding remained a serious problem despite the granting of amnesty to nearly 100,000 prisoners in May. Although the federal minimum standard of space per person in detention is 43 square feet, Presidential Human Rights Council member Andrey Babushkin reported in October that inmates were being confined to spaces far below the mandatory minimum, particularly in prison facilities in larger cities. The size of the country's prison population exacerbated the problem, with the capacity rates at 95 percent, up from 90 percent in 2013.

Penal Reform International reported conditions were generally better in women's colonies than in men's but remained substandard. Thirteen women's facilities also contained facilities for underage children of inmates who had no options for housing them with friends or relatives.

According to a September 8 statement by the Federal Penitentiary Service, a total of 2,640 inmates died during the year.

On July 4, a 26-year-old Kyrgyz inmate, Akbarali Akbaraliyev, died after prison authorities reportedly beat him while he was in solitary detention for 15 days at Penitentiary Facility #46 in Nevnyansk, Sverdlovsk oblast. Akbaraliyev's death led to a protest in which hundreds of inmates went on a hunger strike. Authorities filed charges of intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm resulting in death and exceeding authority with the use of violence against Warden Il'ya Chikin and other officials at the facility.

On November 25, Vitaliy Pop, a 16-year-old Ukrainian citizen, died after authorities at the Belorechensk penal colony beat him severely. Pop, who was serving a five-year sentence for a store robbery despite being a minor with no previous criminal record, had reportedly told his parents that newcomers to the penal colony were routinely abused. During the beating prison staff reportedly called Pop names considered derogatory to Ukrainians.

During the year 197 persons died in police stations, pretrial detention, or temporary detention, according to a tally maintained by the website Russian Ebola. Causes of death included medical conditions, suicide, and injuries sustained while in detention. In August a total of six detainees died in police stations, five in temporary detention centers, four in investigative detention, and one in a police vehicle. Of these 16 deaths, authorities attributed four to "sudden deterioration of health," four to a fire in a detention center, three to suicide, two to heart attacks, and one as alcohol-related. Injuries reportedly sustained while in detention caused the remaining two fatalities.

Police detained Tajik migrant Zarina Yunusova and her five-month-old son Umarali Nazarov in St. Petersburg on October 13. Nazarov died on October 14 after authorities had separated him from his mother. Police claimed the boy died of a respiratory infection and continued with deportation proceedings against Yunusova. The St. Petersburg prosecutor's office reported in November that the detention facility where they had been held was unsuitable for living and opened a criminal investigation on charges of death by negligence. Nazarov's parents were also under investigation for failing in their parental duties.

In the case of Sergey Magnitskiy, a lawyer who died of medical neglect and abuse while in pretrial detention in 2009, authorities did not as of year's end bring those responsible for his death to justice. The investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death remained officially closed.

There were reports that prison staff abused prisoners. In May scores of prisoners cut their forearms and refused medical attention to protest physical abuse by prison staff at a penal colony in the Amur Oblast.

Prisoner-on-prisoner violence was also a problem. In some cases prison authorities encouraged prisoners to abuse certain inmates. In February, four prisoners killed fellow inmate Aleksey Shangina in a Moscow detention facility, and one of the suspects stated that the attack was carried out under the instructions of a police officer. There were elaborate inmate-enforced caste systems in which certain groups, including informers, gay inmates, rapists, prison rape victims, and child molesters, were considered "untouchables" (the lowest caste). Prison authorities provided little or no protection to these groups.

Health, nutrition, ventilation, and sanitation standards varied between facilities but generally were poor. Potable water sometimes was rationed. Access to quality medical care remained a significant problem in the penal system. For example, Chelyabinsk prisoner Vladimir Kondrulin died in August of prostate cancer in a prison facility for tuberculosis treatment, despite prior warnings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) that he would likely die if not immediately moved to a facility where he could receive appropriate medical attention. The Chelyabinsk District Court and Chelyabinsk Oblast Court refused to approve his transfer.

Tuberculosis and HIV among the country's prison population continued to be significant problems. The Federal Penitentiary Services reported that nearly 4 percent of the country's prison population was infected with tuberculosis, while the HIV rate among prisoners increased 6 percent compared with 2014. Although all correctional facilities had medical units or health centers, only 41 treatment facilities provided treatment for tuberculosis patients, down from 58 in 2014, and only nine prisons provided medical services for drug addiction. In January 2014 the Leningrad Oblast prosecutor's office released an audit of the region's prison health-care facilities that indicated numerous violations of statutory standards of care for HIV-infected and tuberculosis patients in diagnosis and treatment as well as standards for evaluating test results.

On May 6, a riot broke out in a facility in Nizhny Novgorod for prisoners with tuberculosis, leaving one dead and more than 20 injured. The riot reportedly was sparked by inhuman conditions for sick prisoners, including being forced to work up to 12 hours per day.

In a 2012 pilot judgment in the case of *Ananyev v. Russia*, the ECHR noted that inadequate conditions of detention were a recurrent and systemic problem in the country and ordered the government to draft a binding implementation plan to remedy the situation. In 2012 the government submitted an action plan for implementing the court's ruling. Since the action plan was released, however, there were no significant indications of progress. Prison conditions remained poor, as evidenced by the 30 ECHR judgments against the country in 2014 for inhuman and degrading prison conditions.

According to the Ministry of Justice, in 2014 the government paid 58 million rubles (\$890,000) in compensatory damages for substandard conditions of detention in SIZOs, a more than twofold increase from 2013. The average amount of compensation was approximately 20,000 rubles (\$308).

Administration: Prisoners had visitation rights, but authorities could deny access to visitors depending on the circumstances. Authorities allowed prisoners serving a regular sentence four three-day visits with their spouses per year. On occasion prison officials cancelled visits if the

prison did not have enough space to accommodate them. The judge or investigator in a prisoner's case could deny the prisoner visitation rights. Authorities could also prohibit relatives deemed a security risk from visiting prisoners. The number of visitors was limited, usually to two adults and two children on each visit.

While prisoners could file complaints with public oversight commissions or with the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, they were often afraid of reprisal. Prison reform activists reported that only prisoners who believed they had no other option risked the consequences of filing a complaint. Complaints that reached the oversight commissions often focused on minor personal requests.

There were no completely independent bodies to investigate credible allegations of inhuman conditions. In November 2014 new members were added to public oversight commissions, but appointment and selection procedures prevented many human rights defenders from participating, decreasing the effectiveness of oversight commission observation in many regions. At the same time, authorities increased appointments of former military, police, and prison officials to oversight commissions, effectively placing them under the control of law enforcement agencies. According to activists and media reports, the independence of the oversight commissions varied by region. *Vedomosti* newspaper reported that, after the selection of new members for the Moscow public oversight commission in 2013, the majority of commission members were former officers of the security services and former prison officials, rather than human rights activists who had historically made up the majority of commission members.

Independent Monitoring: There were no prison ombudsmen. The law regulating public oversight of detention centers allows public oversight commission representatives to visit facilities. According to the Russian Public Chamber, there were a total of 1,144 public oversight commissions spread over 81 regions. By law there should be five to 40 members on each commission. Authorities permitted only the oversight commissions to visit prisons regularly to monitor conditions. There were reports, however, that prison officials, citing disease or danger, denied access to inspectors upon arrival. According to the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, public oversight commissions were legally entitled to have access to all prison and detention facilities, including psychiatric facilities, but prison authorities often prevented them from accessing these facilities. The law does not establish procedures for local authorities to respond to oversight commission findings or recommendations, which are not legally binding.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

While the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, authorities engaged in arbitrary arrest and detention with impunity.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Investigative Committee, and the Office of the Prosecutor General are responsible for law enforcement at all levels of government. The FSB is responsible for security, counterintelligence, and counterterrorism as well as for fighting organized crime and corruption. The national police force under the Ministry of Internal Affairs is organized into federal, regional, and local levels.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

By law authorities may arrest and hold a suspect for up to 48 hours without court approval, provided there is evidence of the crime or a witness; otherwise, an arrest warrant is required. After arrest, police typically take detainees to the nearest police station, where they inform them of their rights. Police must prepare a protocol stating the grounds for the arrest, and both detainee and

police officer must sign it within three hours of detention. Police must interrogate detainees within the first 24 hours of detention. Prior to interrogation a detainee has the right to meet with an attorney for two hours. No later than 12 hours after detention, police must notify the prosecutor. They must also notify the detainee's relatives unless a prosecutor issues a warrant to keep the detention secret. Police are required to release a detainee after 48 hours, subject to bail conditions, unless a court decides, at a hearing, to prolong custody in response to a motion filed by police not less than eight hours before the 48-hour detention period expires. The defendant and his or her attorney must be present at the court hearing.

By law police must complete their investigation and transfer a case to a prosecutor for arraignment within two months of a suspect's arrest, although an investigative authority may extend a criminal investigation for up to 12 months. Extensions beyond 12 months need the approval of the head federal investigative authority in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Drug Control Service, the FSB, or Investigative Committee. According to some defense lawyers, these time limits often were exceeded, especially in cases with a high degree of public interest.

There were a number of problems relating to defendants' ability to obtain adequate defense counsel. Federal law provides defendants the right to choose their own lawyers, but investigators generally did not respect this provision, instead designating lawyers friendly to the prosecution. These "pocket" defense attorneys agreed to the interrogation of their clients in their presence while making no effort to defend their clients' legal rights. In many cases, especially in more remote regions, defense counsel was not available for indigent defendants. Judges usually did not suppress confessions of suspects taken without a lawyer present. Judges at times freed suspects held in excess of detention limits, although they usually granted prosecutors' motions to extend detention periods.

Authorities generally respected the legal limitations on detention except in the North Caucasus. There were reports of occasional noncompliance with the 48-hour limit for holding a detainee. At times authorities failed to issue an official detention protocol within the required three hours after detention and held suspects longer than the legal detention limits. The practice was widespread in the North Caucasus (see section 1.g.) and unevenly applied.

Caucasian Knot, an independent online news site, reported that on August 26, law enforcement officials in Dagestan detained Akhmed Akhmedov on suspicion of attacking a police officer. Akhmedov's wife submitted a complaint to the human rights NGO Memorial Human Rights Center, noting that she had not been informed of her husband's whereabouts since his detention. At year's end there was no information regarding his whereabouts.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were many reports of arbitrary arrest. Following prayers at a mosque in Dagestan on May 8, police detained 10 to 15 men leaving the building when they refused to give their names and addresses. Witnesses told *Caucasian Knot* that the men were held until late evening before being released. None of the men was charged with a crime.

Pretrial Detention: According to statistics released by the Supreme Court, domestic courts, relying on the arguments of the prosecution, granted more than 90 percent of applications for detention orders and nearly 100 percent of requests to extend the duration of detention orders.

Protracted Detention of Rejected Asylum Seekers or Stateless Persons: Authorities continued to detain asylum seekers while their cases were pending as well as all rejected asylum seekers prior to deportation or pending judicial review (see section 2.d.). Human rights NGOs reported authorities used protracted detention in such cases, including detention past the legal limit of 18 months.

Amnesty: Under an amnesty program from President Putin in honor of the 70th anniversary of (World War II) Victory Day in May, nearly 100,000 nonviolent criminals were released from penal colonies and detention centers, according to Valeriy Maksimenko, acting head of the Federal Penitentiary Service.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but judges remained subject to influence from the executive branch, the armed forces, and other security forces, particularly in high-profile or politically sensitive cases. The law requires judicial approval of arrest warrants, searches, seizures, and detentions. Officials generally honored this requirement, although bribery or political pressure sometimes subverted the process of obtaining judicial warrants. The outcomes of some trials appeared predetermined (see section 1.e., Political Prisoners and Detainees).

The human rights ombudsman received 59,100 complaints in 2014, a 43 percent increase compared with 2013. The largest number of complaints (32 percent) was submitted for violations of criminal proceedings and violations during trials.

Judges routinely received calls from superiors instructing them how to rule in specific cases. In 2013 the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights reported, "In practice [judges] do not possess genuine, as opposed to declaratory, independence. The powers of a judge who does not agree to carry out the requests may be prematurely terminated. In such a situation, the conscientious judge is subject to pressure from within the judicial system and has no chance of defending his or her own rights."

A 2013 report by the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner on the protection of human rights in the country's judicial system noted that "perceptions persist that judges were not shielded from undue pressure, including from within the judiciary."

In many cases authorities reportedly did not provide adequate protection for witnesses and victims from intimidation or threats from powerful criminal defendants.

Trial Procedures

The defendant has a legal presumption of innocence. A judge without a jury typically hears trials (bench trials). The law provides for the use of jury trials for a limited range of crimes in higher-level regional courts. Certain crimes, including terrorism, espionage, hostage taking, and inciting mass disorder, must be heard by panels of three judges rather than by juries. Juries tried approximately 800 to 900 cases each year, or approximately 0.02 percent of all criminal cases. While judges acquitted less than 1 percent of defendants, juries acquitted an estimated 20 percent. Legal experts attributed the decline in the number of jury trials since 2008 to an effort by officials to avoid acquittals in criminal cases.

The law allows prosecutors to appeal acquittals, which they did in most cases. Prosecutors may also appeal what they regard as lenient sentences. Appellate courts reversed approximately 30 percent of acquittals and remanded them for a new trial, although these cases often ended in a second acquittal.

During trial the defense is not required to present evidence and is given an opportunity to cross-examine witnesses and call defense witnesses, although judges may deny the defense this opportunity. Defendants who are in custody during a trial were confined to a caged area, which was replaced by glass enclosures in some courts. Defendants have the right of appeal. Prior to trial defendants receive a copy of their indictment, which describes the charges against them in detail. They also have the opportunity to review their criminal file following the completion of the

criminal investigation. The law provides for the appointment of an attorney free of charge if a defendant cannot afford one, although the high cost of competent legal service meant that lower-income defendants often lacked competent representation. There were few qualified defense attorneys in remote areas of the country. Defense attorneys may visit their clients in detention, although defense lawyers claimed authorities electronically monitored their conversations and did not always provide them access to their clients.

Plea bargaining was used to settle approximately 64 percent of criminal cases in 2014, and the law allows a defendant to receive a reduced sentence for testifying against others. Plea bargains reduced defendants' time in pretrial detention in approximately 50 percent of cases, reduced the average prison term to no more than half of the otherwise applicable statutory maximum, and allowed courts and prosecutors to devote their resources to other cases.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were political prisoners in the country, and authorities detained and prosecuted individuals for political reasons. On October 30, the Memorial Human Rights Center's updated list of political prisoners included 50 names, an increase from the 46 individuals the organization listed in 2014. Those added to the list during the year included Oleg Navalny (convicted of embezzlement, although the charges were widely regarded as retribution for the political activities of his brother Aleksey); blogger Vadim Tyumentsev (public calls for extremism using the internet and the incitement of hatred or enmity); and Director of the Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow Natalia Sharina (inciting ethnic hatred and denigration of human dignity; see section 2.a., Freedom of Speech and Press). In August the Chronicle of Current Events published a list of 217 political prisoners that included opposition politicians, human rights activists, environmental activists, religious believers, and bloggers.

On June 27, the Moscow City Court denied the appeal of opposition activist Aleksey Navalny and his brother Oleg Navalny, who were found guilty of fraud in December 2014 in a case involving the Yves-Rocher company. Aleksey had received a three-and-a-half year suspended sentence, while Oleg continued to serve a three-and-a-half year prison term. Observers regarded both cases as politically motivated. The harassment of Aleksey Navalny continued, since authorities placed him under house arrest in January and detained him multiple times. On February 20, he received a 15-day prison sentence for distributing leaflets publicizing a demonstration.

After the country's military intervention in and purported "annexation" of Crimea in March 2014, judicial authorities began to transfer court cases to Russia from occupied Crimea for trial. In September 2014 Russian authorities transferred from Crimea to the Krasnodar Kray the son of prominent exiled Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Jemilev, Khaiser Jemilev, whom they arrested in 2013, and charged him with fatally shooting his neighbor, Fevzi Edemova. The Krasnodar Kray Court convicted him of manslaughter and sentenced him to a five-year imprisonment on June 2. Prior to the Russian court's ruling, a Ukrainian court convicted Jemilev of manslaughter in absentia in May and sentenced him to 44 months in prison. The Ukrainian government demanded his extradition from Russia, noting that according to the European Convention on Human Rights and the Russian constitution, he cannot be convicted twice for the same crime.

On August 25, the Northern Caucasus Military District Court sentenced Ukrainian filmmaker Oleh Sentsov to 20 years in a prison camp after convicting him on terrorism charges widely seen as politically motivated. The other defendants in the case, Ukrainian citizens Hennadiy Afanasyev, Oleksiy Chirniy, and Oleksandr Kolchenko, received sentences ranging from seven to 10 years. The men had been detained in May 2014 on suspicion that the group was "plotting terrorist acts" in association with the Right Sector nationalist group. During Sentsov's trial, Afanasyev retracted his testimony, saying that he had been tortured and coerced into signing a false statement against

Sentsov. Human rights activists in the country publicly stated they believed Sentsov's case was retribution for his opposition to Russia's actions in Ukraine.

The politically motivated trial of Lieutenant Nadiya Savchenko on charges of killing two Russian journalists in Metalist, Ukraine, began in Donetsk, Russia, on September 22. Savchenko, a Ukrainian military pilot and Rada deputy detained by Russian authorities since June 2014, also faced charges of attempted murder and entering Russia illegally. She pleaded not guilty to all the charges. On December 18, Savchenko began a hunger strike after authorities extended her detention into April 2016. Her trial, as well as her hunger strike, continued at the end of the year.

Other Ukrainians in Russian detention on politically motivated charges included Valentin Vygovskiy, sentenced in December to 11 years' imprisonment on espionage charges; Yuriy Soloshenko, sentenced to six years in a penal colony for espionage; Serhii Litvinov, detained for alleged war crimes; and Mykola Karpyuk and Stanislav Klykh, accused of participating in military activities against Russian armed forces during the war in Chechnya in the 1990s.

There were continued court rulings and arrests related to the 2012 Bolotnaya Square case, initiated in connection with clashes between police and protesters at a demonstration on the eve of President Putin's inauguration in 2012. Many human rights groups considered the Bolotnaya case to be politically motivated. Dmitry Buchenkov was detained on December 4 for his alleged participation in the protest. In addition, authorities detained Ivan Nepomnyashchikh on February 25 and charged him with assaulting police at a protest in 2012. On December 22, authorities sentenced Nepomnyashchikh to 2.5 years' imprisonment. On September 17, the ECHR ruled that the state had not brought three Bolotnaya defendants to trial within a reasonable time and ordered the government to compensate them 2,000 to 3,000 euros (\$2,200 to \$3,300) each.

On December 22, the Tambov Oblast Court upheld a decision to release on parole Yevgeniy Vitishko, an activist with the Environmental Watch of the North Caucasus, who was convicted in 2013 on politically motivated charges (for damaging the fence of the Krasnodar governor's dacha) and sentenced to three years in prison. Amnesty International named Vitishko a "prisoner of conscience" and the Memorial Human Rights Center considered him a political prisoner. On November 21, Vitishko undertook a 20-day hunger strike in response to prosecutors' attempts to block his release following a lower court decision to grant him parole. He served 22 months of the three-year sentence.

There were reports that authorities lodged politically motivated charges of treason and espionage against individuals, often in connection with the conflict in Ukraine. In 2012 the government redefined treason to include providing assistance to a foreign state or international organization directed against the country's national security. The Moscow City Court reported that from January 2014 to March 3, authorities arrested nine persons on such charges in the capital, while 15 persons were convicted of treason in 2014, nearly four times as many as in the previous year.

On January 21, authorities arrested Svetlana Davydova, a mother of seven, in the Smolensk oblast and charged her with treason. Davydova had called the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow in April 2014 to report that she had overheard that Russian troops would be deploying to Ukraine. After a public outcry, authorities dropped the charges against her in March.

On September 21, the Moscow City Court sentenced Gennadiy Kravtsov, a former intelligence officer, to a 14-year sentence for treason. After Kravtsov left the military intelligence service in 2005, authorities arrested him in May 2014 after he sent a resume to a Swedish firm and accused him of revealing state secrets related to Russian satellites. Kravtsov's lawyer believed the increased use of the treason law in such cases was part of a broader crackdown on contact between Russians and foreign entities.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Although the law provides mechanisms for individuals to file lawsuits against authorities for violations of civil rights, these mechanisms often did not work well. For example, the law provides that a defendant who has been acquitted after a trial has the right to compensation from the government. Human rights activists claimed authorities avoided paying compensation through procedural means, such as leaving cases in pending status. Persons who believed their civil rights had been violated typically sought redress in the ECHR after the domestic courts had ruled against them.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law forbids officials from entering a private residence except in cases prescribed by federal law or when authorized by a judicial decision. The law also prohibits government monitoring of correspondence, telephone conversations, and other means of communication without a warrant and prohibits the collection, storage, utilization, and dissemination of information about a person's private life without his or her consent. There were allegations government officials and others engaged in electronic surveillance without appropriate authorization and entered residences and other premises without warrants.

Law enforcement agencies require telecommunications service providers to grant the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB continuous remote access to client databases, including telephone and electronic communication and records, enabling police to track private communications and monitor internet activity without the provider's knowledge. The law permits authorities to monitor telephone calls in real time, with a warrant. The Ministry of Information and Communication requires telecommunications service providers to allow the FSB to tap telephones and monitor information over the internet. The Ministry of Information and Communication maintained authorities would not access information without a court order, although the FSB is not required to show it upon request.

A 2014 law that went into effect on September 1 requires that websites maintain user information databases on the territory of the country and provide this information to the security services upon request (see section 2.a.).

Officials often singled out persons with dark complexions from the Caucasus as well as individuals who appeared to be of African or Asian origin for document checks. There were credible reports that police arbitrarily imposed fines on unregistered persons in excess of legal requirements or demanded bribes.

g. Use of Excessive Force and Other Abuses in Internal Conflicts

Violence continued in the North Caucasus republics, driven by separatism, interethnic conflict, jihadist movements, vendettas, criminality, excesses by security forces, and the activity of terrorists. Media reported that as of October 31, the total number of deaths and injuries due to the conflicts in the North Caucasus decreased significantly compared with the same period in 2014 in all republics of the North Caucasus. According to human rights activists in the region, violence in Dagestan and Chechnya continued at a high level. Dagestan continued to be the most violent area in the North Caucasus, with approximately 60 percent of all casualties in the region. Local media described the level of violence in Dagestan as the result of Islamic militant insurgency tactics continuing from the Chechen wars as well as the high level of organized crime in the region.

Killings: *Caucasian Knot* reported that as of October 31, there were at least 169 deaths and 32 injuries in the North Caucasus as a result of armed conflicts in the region. As of September with 95 deaths from armed conflict, in Dagestan was the most deadly region. Of the deaths in

Dagestan, 71 were militants, 14 were civilians, and 10 were law enforcement officers. This represented a significant decrease from the same period in 2014, since the overall number of casualties dropped by almost two-thirds, and by half in Dagestan.

In a change from previous years, no journalists were killed in the North Caucasus during the year (see section 2.a.).

There continued to be reports that use of indiscriminate force by security forces resulted in numerous deaths or disappearances and that authorities did not prosecute the perpetrators. According to *Caucasian Knot* and human rights groups, on March 21, police in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, sealed off an apartment block and commenced an operation to clear a building of suspected militants. While checking the identification documents of residents, they came across a woman with a child who refused to leave her apartment, leading authorities to presume she was likely a militant. Although the child was eventually able to leave, police killed seven persons in two different apartments in the building, including the woman, after one of the suspects shot and killed a police officer. Police found ammunition in only one apartment, which indicated that the couple killed in the second apartment were not part of the militant group and were caught in the crossfire. Nevertheless, police labeled the couple as "rebels."

Local militants continued to engage in violent acts against local security forces, often resulting in deaths.

Abductions: Government personnel, militants, and criminal elements continued to engage in abductions in the North Caucasus. According to the prosecutor general, as of 2011 there were more than 2,000 unsolved disappearances in the North Caucasus District. According to data from *Caucasian Knot*, the official list of missing persons in the North Caucasus contained 7,570 names. Local activists asserted that the number of missing persons in Chechnya was much higher than officially reported, potentially up to 20,000 individuals.

There were reports that state security forces in the North Caucasus conducted counterterrorist operations that resulted in disappearances. For example, on August 2, a resident of Dagestan was reported missing near the Dagestan-Chechnya border after a relative claimed two vehicles filled with men in camouflage outfits abducted the man and drove toward Chechnya. The man returned home on August 10, claiming that law enforcement agents had interrogated and tortured him with electric current.

There were also accounts of persons being detained by police or unknown individuals. On April 24, police detained the 28-year-old son of a local leader at a relative's shop in Ingushetia. When his father tried to ascertain his whereabouts, police told him that his son would be extradited to Samara to face charges there. The detained man's attorney was denied the ability to meet him. There was no new information on this case at the end of the year.

In Chechnya the local Ministry of Public Health continued issuing genetic passports to relatives of individuals who were kidnapped or disappeared during the first and second Chechen Wars. The genetic passport offers relatives the ability to identify remains that may belong to their family. As of July an estimated 32 Chechen residents received genetic passports during the year, bringing the total to more than 300. Chechnya's Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed to have a database containing 3,016 missing persons, but human rights activists believed the actual number of missing persons to be higher.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: Armed forces and police units reportedly abused and tortured both militants and civilians in holding facilities.

On January 27, security services detained two men in Grozny, reportedly beat them, and shaved their beards off with blunt instruments. Observers speculated that the men had been targeted due to their beards, which are allegedly associated with Wahhabism in the region.

Human rights groups noted authorities often did not act to address widespread reports of physical abuse of women.

The law requires relatives of terrorists to pay the cost of damages caused by an attack, which human rights advocates criticized as collective punishment.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

While the constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, the government increasingly restricted those rights. The government instituted several new laws that restrict both freedom of speech and press. Regional and local authorities used procedural violations and restrictive or vague legislation to detain, harass, or prosecute persons who criticized the government. The government exercised greater editorial control over state-controlled media than it had previously, creating a media landscape in which most citizens were exposed predominately to government-approved narratives. Significant government pressure on independent media constrained coverage of numerous problems, especially the situation in Ukraine, LGBTI problems, the environment, elections, criticism of local or federal leadership, as well as issues of secessionism or federalism. Self-censorship in television and the print media was increasingly widespread, particularly on issues critical of the government or its policies. The government used direct ownership or ownership by large private companies with government links to control or influence major national media and regional media outlets, especially television.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Government-controlled media frequently used terms such as "traitor," "foreign agent," and "fifth column" to describe individuals expressing views critical of or different from government policy, leading to a climate intolerant of dissent.

A number of public figures were attacked or killed after publicly questioning the government's policies. On February 27, opposition politician Boris Nemtsov was shot and killed within sight of the Kremlin (see section 1.a.). Nemtsov was frequently criticized on state-controlled television, and after his death his daughter blamed "Russian propaganda" for creating an atmosphere that made his death possible. At the time of his killing, Nemtsov was preparing a detailed report on the involvement of Russian soldiers in the conflict in Ukraine.

In September opposition lawmaker Lev Shlosberg was expelled from the Pskov oblast legislature, a move he attributed to his investigation and publishing of information concerning the death of local paratroopers in Ukraine. In August 2014 after making public his investigations, Shlosberg was attacked while walking to a meeting with colleagues and was hospitalized with serious injuries.

Private citizens who expressed views counter to government policies faced discrimination, harassment, and physical abuse. On December 25, 18-year-old Vlad Kolesnikov committed suicide after having been expelled from his home, expelled from school, and beaten by classmates following his wearing of a T-shirt in June with the words, "Return Crimea."

New laws criminalize certain types of expression. Expansions to the law on state secrets classify any information revealing Russian military casualties as a state secret, regardless of whether they

occurred during times of war or peace. At year's end authorities had not prosecuted anyone under the new laws.

Authorities invoked the 2013 law prohibiting the "propaganda" of nontraditional sexual relations to minors to restrict the free speech of LGBTI persons and their supporters (see section 6). In September the social media platform Vkontakte carried out a request by Roskomnadzor, the country's mass communications watchdog agency and communications regulator, to block the website Deti 404 (Children 404), an online forum for Russian-speaking LGBTI teenagers to write openly and anonymously about their daily lives and hardships. On December 12, authorities charged the former director of the LGBT organization "Maximum," Sergey Alekseenko, with violating the "propaganda" law through his posts on VKontakte that stated, "Being gay means being a brave and confident person, with dignity and self-esteem."

In May the Moscow mayor's office rejected an application by Moscow-based activists to organize an LGBTI pride parade (see sections 2.b. and 6).

Authorities continued to misuse the country's expansive definition of extremism as a tool to stifle dissent. As of September 29, the Ministry of Justice expanded its list of extremist materials to include 3,072 books, videos, websites, social media pages, musical compositions, and other items, an increase of more than 600 items from the same date in 2014. On December 1, Oleg Novozhenin, an internet user who lived in the Siberian town of Surgut, was sentenced to one year in prison under article 282 of the criminal code for distributing "extremist materials" on social networks. According to media reports, Novozhenin posted to his VKontakte page audio and video files of the Ukrainian nationalist party organization "Right Sector" (banned in Russia) and the right-wing "Azov" volunteer battalion. In October authorities detained the director of the Moscow-based state-funded Library of Ukrainian Literature, Natalia Sharina, and charged her with inciting ethnic hatred and denigrating human dignity for making available alleged anti-Russian propaganda and extremist books, including by a Ukrainian nationalist author whose work is banned in Russia. On December 14, authorities searched the homes of multiple employees of the Library of Ukrainian Literature while Sharina remained under house arrest.

By law authorities may close any organization that a court determines to be extremist, including media outlets and websites, and the organization cannot challenge the court's decision. Roskomnadzor routinely issued warnings to newspapers and internet sources suspected of publishing extremist materials. Three warnings in one year were enough to initiate a closure lawsuit. In July the agency issued its second warning within a 12-month period to independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* in response to a published excerpt from a novel that included an expletive, even though several letters of the word were replaced with asterisks.

In the wake of the attack in France against the editors of the French weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, Roskomnadzor publicly warned media against publishing religious-themed cartoons and issued warnings to six media outlets that published cartoons from the French satirical magazine. Human rights groups reported such intimidation encouraged journalists and editors, who rarely were prosecuted directly, to censor themselves.

Press and Media Freedoms: The government increasingly restricted press freedom. The government, state-owned, or state-controlled companies directly owned more than 60 percent of the country's 45,000 registered local newspapers and periodicals. The federal or local governments or progovernment individuals completely or partially owned approximately 66 percent of the 2,500 television stations, including all six national channels. Government-owned media outlets often received preferential benefits, such as rent-free occupancy of government-owned buildings. At many government-owned or controlled outlets, the state increasingly dictated editorial policy. A 2014 law, effective in January 2016, restricts foreign ownership of media outlets to no more

than 20 percent. In anticipation of the law, foreign media owners began restructuring or selling their assets to Russian investors who often had close connections with the government. In September, CTC Media, which operated a handful of network and cable channels, sold a 75 percent stake in the company to UTH, a media conglomerate owned by Alisher Usmanov, a government-connected tycoon. Ostensibly a Russian company, CTC Media was incorporated in the United States, subjecting it to the new ownership law.

The government continued to pressure the leadership of the leading independent news outlets that exposed government abuses, including *Novaya Gazeta*, Dozhd, and RBK. Independent news outlets publishing stories critical of the government often faced official and unofficial retaliation for such coverage. On January 1, the local Tomsk television channel TV-2, one of the first independent news stations in the country, was forced to stop broadcasting after the state-run regional broadcasting center cancelled its agreement with the station, thus making it available only through certain cable packages. Local courts rejected three appeals from the channel arguing that the broadcast center's decision to cancel the contract was illegal. TV-2's editor claimed the threat was an effort by Roskomnadzor to punish the station for being an independent voice on local issues.

In March the leading independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* announced that it would consider ceasing to publish physical copies of the newspaper due to financial difficulties. The chief editor noted that the newspaper could not compete with official media, which received state financial support.

Government targeting of independent, liberal-leaning TV Dozhd persisted during the year. The station only operated online, via paid subscriptions, after the largest cable television providers dropped the channel in January 2014 reportedly under pressure from authorities. In September, State Duma deputy and leader of the nationalist Rodina party, Aleksey Zhuravlev, requested the general prosecutor conduct an inspection of Dozhd for potential violations of the law on mass media and on extremist activity, citing the station's transmission of BBC and Deutsche Welle broadcasts. Zhuravlev claimed the station broadcast stories aimed at discrediting the country and its involvement in Ukraine. On December 7, Dozhd's offices were inspected on the grounds of investigating the channel's compliance with antiextremism, labor, and licensing legislation. The district prosecutor announced that while investigators had found some safety and labor related violations, these infractions did not "affect the rights and freedoms of citizens."

Many newspapers ensured their financial viability by agreeing to various types of "support contracts" with government ministries, under which they agreed to provide positive coverage of government officials and policies in news stories. Absent direct government support, independent news publications reported difficulty attracting advertising and securing financial viability, since advertisers feared retaliation if their brands became linked to publications that criticized the government.

According to the Glasnost Defense Fund and other NGOs, authorities used the media's widespread dependence on the government for access to property, printing, and distribution services to discourage critical reporting. Approximately 90 percent of the print media relied on state-controlled entities for paper, printing, and distribution services, and that many television stations were forced to rely on the government for access to the airwaves and office space. Officials continued to manipulate the price of printing at state-controlled publishing houses to pressure private media rivals.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to be subjected to arrest, imprisonment, physical attack, harassment, and intimidation as a result of their reporting. The Glasnost Defense Fund reported numerous actions against journalists in 2014, including five killings, 52 attacks, 107

detentions by law enforcement officers, 200 prosecutions, 29 threats against journalists, 15 politically motivated firings, and two attacks on media offices.

While the government at times successfully prosecuted persons who harmed or killed journalists, efforts to identify and prosecute those who ordered the attacks appeared stymied by political considerations. In October journalist Oleg Kashin accused President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev of shielding Pskov governor Andrey Turchak, whom Kashin claimed ordered a severe beating attack on him in Moscow in 2010 in retaliation for Kashin's public criticism of Turchak's performance as governor. Law enforcement authorities arrested two of the three alleged attackers, while Turchak remained free.

Journalists reporting in or on the North Caucasus district remained particularly vulnerable to physical attacks, including killing, for their in-depth reporting. An online news agency founded by the Chechen Information Ministry published an article in May comparing *Novaya Gazeta* investigative journalist Elena Milashina with slain journalist Anna Politkovskaya and threatened that she ultimately could face the same fate. The article appeared in the wake of Milashina's reporting on the forced marriage of an underage girl to an already married regional police chief with alleged ties to Chechen head Kadyrov (see section 6, Early and Forced Marriage).

Shortly after the killing of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov in February, local news reported rumors on the existence of an alleged "hit list" that included Nemtsov, as well as Aleksey Venediktov, chief of the independent radio and news organization Ekho Moskv, and Kseniya Sobchak, a newswoman at TV Dozhd, in retaliation for their critical reporting on the government. Chechen leader Kadyrov also threatened Venediktov, stating via social media that he had turned Ekho Moskv into the "main anti-Islamic mouthpiece" and that "there will be people who will take Venediktov to task."

Reports of pressure on journalists increased along with an increase in investigative reporting on the situation in Ukraine, according to NGO reports. In April editors of a local Buryatian newspaper removed an article from its website and physically cut the article out of 50,000 hard copy editions, due to criticism of the article, which concerned a local soldier who sustained heavy burns while fighting among separatists in eastern Ukraine. A previously published expose by *Novaya Gazeta* revealed that the soldier was not a volunteer, as progovernment media previously reported, but rather a Russian contract soldier.

There was no progress in establishing accountability in a number of high-profile killings of journalists, including the 2004 killing of Paul Klebnikov, the 2006 killing of Anna Politkovskaya, and the 2009 killing of Natalia Estemirova.

Journalists and bloggers who uncovered various forms of government malfeasance also faced harassment, either in the form of direct threats to their physical safety or threats to their security or livelihood, often through legal prosecution. A journalist reporting on corruption in Dagestan was kidnapped, forced into a car, and severely beaten by masked assailants in April. The journalist ran a project allowing users to report corruption in their city governments via social networks. He identified one of his attackers as the son of a local city mayor.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government continued to use laws and decrees to censor or restrict media content.

In December 2014 Roskomnadzor issued warnings to four online media sites that published the text of opposition leader Aleksey Navalny's closing arguments from the Yves-Rocher trial (see section 1.e.). Navalny stated that the government "had no right to exist" and called on supporters to protest in the streets. According to Roskomnadzor the reprinting of these statements constituted a call for changing the country's constitutional order and was thus illegal.

Officials or unidentified individuals sometimes used force or took other extralegal measures to prevent the circulation of publications critical of government officials. The Glasnost Defense Fund reported that as of September 2014, officials made 29 attempts to seize or prevent distribution of publications. The Glasnost Defense Fund reported 51 instances of government interference with internet publications by December 2014, compared with 44 instances for the entire year in 2013.

During the year there were reports of courts forbidding high-profile journalists and bloggers from engaging in journalistic activity. In January a court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced journalist Sergey Reznik to a 42-month prison term for allegedly making false claims of police misconduct and publicly insulting representatives of the law. In May, Reznik had completed an 18-month sentence on charges of having allegedly falsified claims of threats made against him. After reporting the threats in 2013, he was attacked by two men with baseball bats and shot with a nonlethal traumatic pistol. Reznik covered regional and municipal abuses and corruption for several local media outlets. As part of his sentence, he was also banned from working in the media industry for two years.

The government utilized antiextremism laws to censor an array of online content (see section 2.a., Internet Freedom).

Libel/Slander Laws: Officials at all levels used their authority, sometimes publicly, to restrict the work of journalists and bloggers who criticized them, including taking legal action for alleged slander or libel. After journalist Kseniya Sobchak publicly challenged President Putin in December 2014 on his tolerance of the Chechen government's order to burn terrorists' families' homes, the Chechen government filed a libel suit against her. The Prosecutor General's Office also stated it would check slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov's report on Russian involvement in the conflict in Ukraine for libel.

National Security: The law places limits on free expression on national security grounds, notably in statutes against extremism and treason (see section 2.a., Freedom of Speech and Expression). In May, President Putin signed a decree classifying any information revealing Russian military casualties as a state secret without regard to whether they occur during times of war or peace. The decree specifically prohibits information concerning deaths that occurred "during special operations." Legal and human rights activists criticized the decree, claiming that it exceeds the powers given to the president by the constitution and citizens' constitutional right to seek and discuss information. They noted that under the law, information about emergencies and disasters that threaten public health and safety were classified, and thus talking to victims' relatives about their loss was now a potential violation of the state secrets law.

Internet Freedom

The government took significant new steps to restrict free expression on the internet. Threats to internet freedom included physical attacks on bloggers; politically motivated prosecutions of bloggers for "extremism," libel, or other crimes; blocking of specific sites by national and local service providers; distributed denial-of-service attacks on sites of opposition groups or independent media; monitoring by authorities of all internet communications; and attempts by national, local, and regional authorities to regulate and criminalize content. The internet was widely available to citizens in all parts of the country, although connection speeds varied by region. According to data compiled by the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 71 percent of the country's population used the internet in 2014.

A report issued by the Association of Internet Users stated that the number of cases in which the rights of internet users were infringed upon increased by more than half in 2014, from 1,832 cases to 2,951. The report noted that in 2014 instances of administrative pressure exerted by Roskomnadzor and the General Prosecutor's Office in their enforcement of antiextremist laws rose

nearly threefold. According to the association, the country's court system was ill equipped to defend users' rights and rule on the legality of state bodies' actions. The association noted only one successful case, that of the website Sibkrai, in which website owners were able to challenge successfully the blockage of a site. Blockages of sites contributed to 2014 being the first year in which there was a decrease in the number of ".ru" domains.

New laws place additional restrictions on internet freedom. On September 1, the country's data on-shoring law went into effect, requiring domestic and foreign businesses to store citizens' personal data on servers located in the country. Critics expressed concern that the law might have negative commercial effects and provide the government with further access to citizens' private information. At year's end Roskomnadzor had begun conducting inspections of companies for compliance; a total of 317 companies were scheduled to be checked.

On August 1, the first anniversary of the 2014 law that requires bloggers with more than 3,000 daily visitors to register with the government or face fines, Roskomnadzor announced that the registry contained the names of more than 600 registered bloggers. The law does not define how to calculate the number of daily visitors, nor has Roskomnadzor provided specific instructions on how to register. Some bloggers reported that Roskomnadzor asked them to register or registered them involuntarily. Bloggers included on the registry are required to comply with laws that restrict certain types of language and content.

Roskomnadzor maintained a federal blacklist of internet sites. It required internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to web pages that the agency deemed offensive or illegal, including information that was already prohibited, such as items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The law gives the prosecutor general and Roskomnadzor authority to demand that ISPs block websites that promote extremist information or "mass public events that are conducted in violation of appropriate procedures."

During the year authorities blocked or threatened to block some websites and social network pages that either criticized government policy or violated laws on internet content. Roskomnadzor briefly blocked the entirety of Reddit and the Russian-language Wikipedia during the year for failing to restrict access to information on narcotics. The communications regulator also blocked access to Yahoo's video site after the service refused to comply with warnings to block access to an Islamic State video. The regulator also increased its requests to Facebook to block content. According to Facebook's statistics, the government asked the company to block content 55 times in the second half of 2014, compared with just four requests in all of 2013. In many regions local prosecutors' offices and courts ordered ISPs to block content on the Federal List of Extremist Materials and the federal internet blacklist.

During the year authorities prosecuted individual bloggers for allegedly extremist content they published online, including the content of other users' comments on their pages. On December 30, a court sentenced blogger Vadim Tyumenstev to five years in prison for his alleged "extremist" activity on the internet, which consisted of urging persons to attend a protest against rising bus fares and criticizing 'the government's intervention in Ukraine. He was further banned from using the internet for three years. The Memorial Human Rights Center stated the jail sentence was "outrageous" and called for the verdict to be overturned.

On December 21, authorities sentenced activist Darya Polyudova to two years' imprisonment for inciting separatism and extremist activities. The charges derived from three posts related to Ukraine on her VKontakte page. The first post was a comment by another user regarding ethnic Ukrainians in the Krasnodar Kray, the second was a photograph of Polyudova with a poster reading, "No war in Ukraine but a revolution in Russia," and the third was a commentary about

how Russians needed to follow the example of Ukraine's Maidan activists. Despite the fact that her VKontakte page had only 38 followers, the posts were deemed a "danger to the public."

In December 2014 Roskomnadzor requested that Facebook block access within the country to a page with information on an unsanctioned protest related to a case against opposition leader Aleksey Navalny and his brother. Roskomnadzor made the request in accordance with the law, which authorizes the agency to block pages that call for protests that would "infringe the public order." Facebook complied with the order.

The government targeted organizations that published information online about the government's activities in Ukraine, especially NGOs and human rights defenders. The St. Petersburg Soldiers' Mothers organization continued to be subject to unannounced inspections and harassment relating to the foreign agent law for its part in seeking transparency and support for Russian soldiers in Ukraine.

There were multiple reports that authorities fined libraries, schools, and internet clubs during the year for failing to block adequately content listed on the Federal List of Extremist Materials or covered under the law defending children from harmful information. In March the Sverdlovsk oblast prosecutor's office found that the central library system of the city of Berezovskiy lacked hardware and software necessary to filter programs on their libraries' computers as required by law and fined the library 20,000 rubles (\$308).

The government continued to employ a "system for operational investigative measures," which requires ISPs to install, at their own expense, a device that routes all customer traffic to an FSB terminal. The system enables police to track private e-mail communications, identify internet users, and monitor their internet activity.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were indications that the government took new steps to restrict academic and cultural freedom.

There were multiple cases of authorities opening criminal investigations against university professors whose writings criticized government policy and in some cases firing them. In March university authorities e-mailed Dmitry Dubrovskiy, a professor and director of the human rights program at the Smolny College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of St. Petersburg State University, that his contract was not being renewed. While the university gave no formal reason for his dismissal, Dubrovskiy believed his activism against hate crimes and in support of LGBTI rights was the reason for his dismissal.

Authorities often censored or shut down cultural events or displays that they considered offensive or that expressed views in opposition to the government and in some cases initiated criminal proceedings against organizers. In March the deputy minister of culture fired the director of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theater, Boris Mezdrich, over alleged desecration of religious symbols in a staging of the Wagner opera Tannhaeuser. A representative of the Russian Orthodox Church wrote a letter to the Prosecutor's Office after the opera's premier accusing the director of the opera and the theater director of intentionally desecrating religious symbols. The Prosecutor's Office subsequently opened an administrative case that was later dismissed for lack of evidence, but Mezdrich remained dismissed from his position.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The law provides for freedom of assembly, but local authorities increasingly restricted this right. The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, or marches by more than one person to notify the government, although authorities maintained that protest organizers must receive government permission, not just provide notification. Failure to obtain official permission to hold a protest resulted in the demonstration being viewed as unlawful by law enforcement officials, who routinely dispersed such protests. While numerous public demonstrations took place, on many occasions local officials selectively denied groups permission to assemble or offered alternate venues that were inconveniently or remotely located. The law provides heavy penalties for engaging in unsanctioned protests and other violations of the law on public assembly, up to 300,000 rubles (\$4,600) for individuals, 600,000 rubles (\$9,200) for organizers, and one million rubles (\$15,000) for groups or companies.

In July 2014 the government enacted legislation that toughens punishment for "mass rioting," under the Law on Meetings, which includes teaching and learning about organization of and participation in "mass riots." In the same legislative action, the government also increased fines for violating protest regulations and rules on holding public events and separately introduced a law prohibiting nighttime demonstrations and meetings. Protesters who violate the regulations multiple times within a six-month period may be fined up to one million rubles (\$15,000) or imprisoned for up to five years. On December 7, a Moscow court sentenced Ildar Dadin to three years' imprisonment for participation in four protests constituting "repeated violations of the rules on conducting public acts," making him the first activist convicted under the new legislation on protests.

In December a Moscow court ordered the detention of Dmitry Buchenkov on charges of taking part in a mass riot and assaulting a police officer, making him the 34th and most recent person to be charged in the 2012 Bolotnaya Square case, initiated in connection with clashes between police and protesters at demonstrations on the eve of President Putin's inauguration (see section 1.e.).

There were multiple reports that human rights activists were subject to threats and physical violence in connection with their public activity. In one example, on June 6, a group of at least eight men attacked six human rights activists in Moscow during a small rally in support of those accused in the Bolotnaya Square case. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the attackers shouted "shame on the Nazis" and called the human rights activists "Maidaners," in reference to the Maidan Square protests in Kyiv in 2013.

Police often broke up demonstrations that were not officially sanctioned and at times used disproportionate force when doing so. On December 12, Moscow authorities arrested 33 protesters, including the leader of the opposition Yabloko political party, at an unsanctioned demonstration in honor of Constitution Day. In December, following his arrest for taking part in a demonstration against the December 2014 conviction of opposition leader Alexey Navalny on charges of embezzlement (see section 1.e.), activist Ildar Dadin stated that police beat him both while being held in a detention center and again while in the emergency room.

According to a report by Amnesty International released in February, street protests became less frequent than in previous years due to the harsher punishments for second violations of protest regulations passed in 2014. It also reported that the majority of public protests in 2014 had been banned, dispersed, or severely restricted.

Authorities continued to restrict "single-person pickets," which require there be at least 164 feet separating protesters from each other. Such pickets had generally been allowed to occur unimpeded before 2014. On September 5, Moscow police arrested Mark Galperin for standing on Manezh Square while holding a sign stating, "We are against corruption." Galperin had previously been arrested multiple times for protesting, including in March 2014 in Moscow for holding

portraits of Ukrainian protesters killed in Kyiv. In the most recent case, the judge refused to allow testimony by witnesses for the defense and denied a motion by the defense to call the arresting officers to testify. The judge also refused to accept as evidence a video of the event, which Galperin's lawyer claimed would prove that the protest was a single-person picket and therefore would not require the authorities' prior approval. A Moscow district court found Galperin guilty in September of conducting a public event without proper registration for the second time, sentencing him to 38 days in jail and fining him 200,000 rubles (\$3,100).

Authorities continued to deprive LGBTI individuals and their supporters of free assembly rights. Despite an October 2014 Supreme Court ruling that LGBTI individuals are a "protected class" and should be allowed to engage in public activities, the law prohibiting so-called propaganda of homosexuality to minors (see section 6) provided grounds to deny assembly rights to LGBTI activists and their supporters. Upheld by the Constitutional Court in September 2014, the law was used on multiple occasions to interrupt public demonstrations by LGBTI activists. For example, Moscow authorities prevented a group of LGBTI organizations from holding a gay pride rally in May. When activists held the parade without authorities' approval, police arrested approximately 20 persons.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association. During the year, however, the government instituted new measures and expanded existing restrictive laws to stigmatize, harass, fine, close, and otherwise raise barriers to membership in organizations that were critical of the government.

Public organizations must register their bylaws and the names of their leaders with the Ministry of Justice. The finances of registered organizations are subject to investigation by tax authorities, and foreign grants must be registered.

The government expanded its use of a 2012 law, which requires NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in "political activity" to register as "foreign agents," to harass, stigmatize, and in some cases halt the operation of NGOs. The original foreign agent amendments to the NGO law authorized the Ministry of Justice and local authorities to require NGOs to self-register only after court proceedings had found them to be foreign agents. In June 2014, however, President Putin signed into law amendments that allow the Ministry of Justice to register independent groups as foreign agents without their consent. During the year the Ministry of Justice added 81 NGOs to the list of foreign agents, more than tripling the total number of organizations on the register. At the end of the year, 111 NGOs were designated as foreign agents.

Inspections of NGOs designated as foreign agents continued on a substantial scale. According to HRW, while authorities inspected a wide range of designated civil society groups from nearly every region of the country, groups that were warned, fined, or prosecuted generally were those active in areas such as election monitoring, human rights advocacy, anticorruption work, and environmental protection. During inspections law enforcement agencies typically brought representatives from as many as a dozen different bodies, including fire inspectors, tax inspectors, and health and safety inspectors, to issue citations to NGOs. In addition state-controlled media crews frequently accompanied authorities during such inspections.

Organizations the government deemed to be foreign agents reported experiencing the social effects of stigmatization, such as being targeted by vandals and online criticism, in addition to losing partners and funding sources and being subjected to smear campaigns in the state-controlled press.

HRW and other observers noted that a wide range of NGO activity was considered "political," including providing information to UN bodies, publishing results of public opinion polling,

providing legal advice to abuse victims, and holding roundtables or seminars to discuss policy matters. By year's end the Ministry of Justice provided no comprehensive definition of the political activities that result in an NGO being listed as a foreign agent, despite calls from the Presidential Human Rights Council (HRC) to define further such activities. During an October 1 meeting of the HRC with President Putin, the council again called for clarification on the definition of political activities. Putin stated that the government would clarify the issue within three months.

Based on repeated requests from the HRC and Human Rights Ombudsman Ella Pamfilova, an amendment to the foreign agent law was created as a mechanism to allow qualifying NGOs to be removed from the foreign agent list. The ability to apply for delisting became effective in March. To be delisted, the NGO in question must submit an application to the Ministry of Justice proving it ceased to receive any foreign funding or engage in political activity within the previous 12 months. If the NGO received any foreign funding, it must have returned the money within three months. The ministry would then initiate an unscheduled inspection of the NGO to determine whether or not it qualified for removal from the list. By year's end only four NGOs were successful in their efforts to qualify for potential removal from the foreign agent list. Even in such cases, however, the Ministry of Justice did not remove the organizations from the list on its website but noted in a separate column the date the NGO qualified for removal.

On May 23, President Putin signed into law new legislation on "undesirable" foreign organizations. According to the definition of the law, a foreign organization may be found undesirable if that group is deemed to be "dangerous to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, its national security, and defense." In accordance with the new law, any foreign organization deemed undesirable must cease its activities, any money or assets found by authorities may be seized, and any citizens found to be continuing to work with the organization in contravention of the law may face up to seven years in prison. The Federation Council identified nearly 20 leading international organizations for possible inclusion on the list. The Prosecutor General's Office, the body responsible for making legal findings under this law, declared four foreign organizations to be undesirable during the year. Responding to the likelihood that it would be declared undesirable, the MacArthur Foundation, a private U.S. philanthropic organization, decided to close its offices in the country.

NGOs engaged in political activities or activities that "pose a threat to the country" that receive support from U.S. persons or organizations are also subject to suspension under the "Dima Yakovlev" law, which prohibits NGOs from having dual Russian-U.S. citizen members.

There were multiple reports that civil society activists were beaten or attacked in retaliation for their professional activities and that law enforcement officials did not adequately investigate the incidents. On October 24, members of two pro-Kremlin organizations attacked 75-year-old civic activist Vladimir Ionov near Red Square while he participated in a single-person picket. The attackers threw paint and a chemical substance on Ionov, causing his eyes and skin to burn. Despite a heavy police presence near Red Square, law enforcement officers did not respond to the attack. Witnesses filmed the event and identified the attackers, but authorities did not press charges. Authorities charged Ionov with violating a new law that prohibits participation in unauthorized protests, including single-person protests, four times within a six-month period, and he faced up to five years in prison if convicted. In December, Ionov sought asylum in Ukraine.

In multiple cases authorities arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted civil society activists in political retaliation for their work (see sections 1.d. and 1.e.).

There were reports that authorities targeted NGOs and activists representing the LGBTI community for retaliation (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's [Report on International Religious Freedom](#).

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. With the exception of Ukrainian refugees, who as a group were well received, the government provided minimal assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. The government seldom cooperated on asylum and refugee problems with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations.

Although the law gives citizens the right to choose their place of residence, all adult citizens must carry government-issued internal passports while traveling domestically and must register with local authorities after arriving at a new location. Those with official refugee or asylum status must request permission to relocate to a district other than the one that originally granted them their status. Authorities often refused to provide government services to individuals without internal passports or proper registration, and many regional governments continued to restrict this right through residential registration rules that closely resembled Soviet-era regulations.

In-country Movement: Authorities require intercity travelers to show their internal passports when buying tickets to travel via air, railroad, water, or road. Authorities imposed travel restrictions on individuals facing prosecution for political purposes. Leonid Volkov, the head of the Democratic Opposition's election movement in Novosibirsk, was charged in August with obstructing the work of a journalist. Authorities reportedly restricted his freedom to travel while they investigated the case.

Foreign Travel: The law provides for freedom to travel abroad, but the government introduced new restrictions on this right during the year, including an amendment that allows for the temporary restriction of citizen's right to exit the country if they are bankrupt. According to press reports, in April 2014 the government restricted foreign travel by approximately five million government employees, mostly from the security services. This included employees of the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Federal Prison Service, the Federal Drug Control Service, the Federal Bailiff Service, the Federal Migration Service (FMS), and the Ministry of Emergency Situations. In February the Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced further restrictions on foreign travel for its employees.

The law on procedures for departing from and entering the country stipulates that a person who violated a court decision has no right to leave the country. A court may prohibit a person from leaving the country for failure to satisfy debts, if the individual is suspected, accused, or convicted of a crime, or if the individual has access to classified material.

Authorities imposed travel restrictions on individuals facing prosecution for political purposes. For example, authorities denied opposition politician Aleksey Navalny (see section 1.e.) a passport in June.

Exile: There were many high-profile cases of self-imposed exile during the year, primarily involving leaders of political opposition movements, NGOs, environmental organizations, and

protesters who feared reprisals for their participation in anti-Putin demonstrations or for their opposition activities.

Internally Displaced Persons

In 2014 the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimated that at least 25,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained in the North Caucasus as a result of wars in Chechnya in the 1990s. The situation for the IDPs displaced after the wars in Chechnya remained poor, with the majority still living in substandard accommodations without proper sanitation and electricity.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The country's laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. NGOs reported applicants commonly paid informal "facilitation fees" of approximately \$500 to FMS adjudicators to have their application reviewed. Applicants who did not speak Russian had to pay for a private interpreter. Human rights organizations noted that nearly all newly arrived refugees and temporary asylum seekers in large cities, in particular Moscow and St. Petersburg, were forced to apply in other regions, allegedly due to full quotas. With the exception of Ukrainians, the FMS approved a small percentage of applications for refugee status and temporary asylum.

Some observers pointed out that FMS data failed to include asylum seekers who were forcibly deported or extradited before exhausting their legal remedies. Some asylum seekers, especially those from Central Asia, also reportedly chose not to make formal applications for asylum because doing so often led to criminal investigations and other unwanted attention from the security services.

Human rights organizations criticized the country's reported preferential treatment of Ukrainian applicants for refugee status and temporary asylum. According to UNHCR and local NGOs, authorities had blanket authority to grant temporary asylum to Ukrainians and prioritized Ukrainian nationals over other nationalities, especially those from African nations. As of November the vast majority of Ukrainian nationals who applied for temporary asylum received this status on a one-year basis and were eligible to apply twice for renewals. This prioritization resulted in longer waiting periods and drastically fewer approvals for non-Ukrainian applicants. Authorities reportedly also, as of November, had blanket authority to grant temporary asylum to Syrians, but according to local NGOs, the FMS stopped granting them temporary asylum and refugee status. Local migration experts noted a decrease in the number of Syrians enjoying temporary asylum, indicating that the FMS did not renew the temporary asylum of hundreds of Syrians. Authorities did not release publicly up-to-date data on non-Ukrainian refugees during the year.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of persons to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The responsible agency, the FMS, did not maintain a presence at airports or other border points and did not adequately publicize that asylum seekers had the ability to request access to the agency. Asylum seekers had to rely on the goodwill of border guards and airline personnel to call immigration officials. Otherwise, they faced immediate return to their countries of origin, including in some cases to countries where they had reasonable grounds to fear persecution.

By law an applicant may appeal the decision of an FMS official to a higher-ranking authority or to a court. During the appeal process, the applicant is legally entitled to the rights of a person whose application for refugee status was being considered.

Human rights groups continued to allege that authorities made improper use of international agreements that permitted them to detain, and possibly repatriate, persons with outstanding arrest warrants from other former Soviet states. This system, enforced by informal ties between senior law enforcement officials of the countries concerned, permitted authorities to detain individuals for up to one month while the Prosecutor General's Office investigated the nature of the warrants. UNHCR and human rights groups noted several cases of disappearances and extralegal return of persons of UNHCR concern, in which officials detained individuals (most commonly from Central Asia) and returned them to their country of origin clandestinely. Rights groups and UNHCR maintained that this could not have happened without the cooperation of several different federal agencies.

Refugee Abuse: UNHCR and NGOs stated that police at times detained, fined, and threatened asylum seekers with deportation and that citizens subjected them to racially motivated assaults.

Access to Basic Services: By law successful temporary asylum seekers and persons whose applications were being processed have the right to work, receive medical care, and attend school. NGOs reported authorities provided some services to Ukrainian asylum seekers, but applicants from other countries were routinely denied these services. During the year authorities closed the majority of government-funded temporary accommodation centers specially erected for Ukrainian nationals waiting to receive temporary asylum. These centers provided shelter, food, medical care, and job-placement assistance. As of November 3, 16,112 Ukrainian nationals remained in these centers throughout the country, but NGOs reported that many inhabitants were Ukrainians with legal status who were paying to live in the facilities. Non-Ukrainian asylum applicants did not have access to these benefits.

While federal law provides for education for all children, regional authorities occasionally denied access to schools to children of temporary asylum and refugee applicants who lacked residential registration. When parents encountered difficulties enrolling their children in school, authorities generally cooperated with UNHCR to resolve the problem. Authorities frequently denied applicants the right to work if they lacked residential registration, which was common due to landlords' preferring not to register occupants for tax reasons.

Temporary Protection: A person who did not satisfy the criteria for refugee status, but who could not be expelled or deported for humanitarian reasons, could receive temporary asylum after submitting a separate application.

Stateless Persons

UNHCR estimated there were approximately 113,470 stateless persons in the country at the end of 2014. Official statistics did not differentiate between stateless person and other categories of persons seeking assistance. UNHCR reported a significant number of Afghans resided in Russia for more than 20 years, including some orphans brought back by Soviet armed forces. The majority of these individuals and their offspring did not have legal status in the country because the FMS repeatedly rejected their applications for temporary asylum and/or refugee status. This Afghan population faced the same risks as newly arrived asylum seekers, including denial of, or lack of, access to medical care, schooling, and housing.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

While the law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, citizens could not fully do so because the government limited the ability of opposition parties to organize, register candidates for public office, access the media, and conduct political campaigns.

In January, President Putin approved the elimination of direct gubernatorial elections in Yamalo-Nenets, Nenets, and Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrugs (districts) in accordance with 2013 legislation allowing regions to opt out of direct gubernatorial elections in favor of a complex system of appointing governors in consultation with the presidency. These districts have status as federal subjects while also being part of larger federal units (Tyumen Oblast and Arkhangelsk Oblast). Residents still vote directly in their respective oblasts, but governors of their districts are now appointed by the oblast governor in consultation with political parties, increasing direct federal control over these resource-rich regions.

In May 2014 President Putin signed legislation allowing regional authorities to abolish direct mayoral elections in major cities. During the year regional legislatures continued to eliminate direct elections, and by November only nine of 83 regional capitals retained direct mayoral elections. The law does not apply to Moscow and St. Petersburg, since the mayors of these cities have the status of governors.

After allegations of voter fraud in the 2011 State Duma elections sparked mass protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg, authorities sought to curtail the work of independent monitors and promote government-sponsored monitoring. While the Ministry of Justice returned the fines paid by the independent vote-monitoring organization Golos for its alleged violation of the Foreign Agents Law in accordance with a 2014 court ruling, Golos-Ural was placed on the foreign agent register in July. An investigation of the organization's Samara director led to the search and seizure of electronics in three directors' homes as well as its Moscow office. The organization's work was curtailed by a 2014 law that bans those organizations listed as "foreign agents" from taking part in the election process. Critics asserted that the law violates the constitution. In April, two election observers from Golos were beaten while attempting to stop an act of election fraud, leading to severe injuries. Authorities initiated criminal cases against the perpetrators but did not begin proceedings at year's end.

The Central Election Commission announced that for budgetary reasons it would eliminate the use of video monitoring at polling stations, a measure introduced for the 2012 presidential elections. Observer groups insisted authorities eliminated these devices in order to prevent the detection of fraud. In July the commission announced that bloggers whose web pages receive more than 3,000 daily visits could comment on elections only during the officially determined campaign period and post only "objective and verifiable information about candidates and parties that does not infringe on candidates' equality."

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On September 13, the country held more than 10,000 elections to select 21 governors and 11 regional legislatures, among other local officials. The elections proceeded smoothly, with fewer allegations of voter fraud than in previous years. Observers noted that candidates from those parties represented in the State Duma faced few problems registering, while smaller "nonsystemic" parties faced myriad hurdles. As in previous years, local authorities disqualified several parties for discrepancies in signatures submitted as part of the registration process. For example, the nonsystemic opposition party, the People's Freedom Party (PARNAS), which represented a coalition of opposition parties, attempted to compete in four regions but was ultimately allowed to participate only in the Kostroma oblast. Nationalist parties Rodina and Patriots of Russia as well as the Communists of Russia also faced registration problems in several regions.

The citizen-organized election monitoring organization Golos, which observed the regional elections in 26 regions, alleged 826 election-day violations, including improper use of administrative resources, vote buying, pressuring voters, obstruction of campaign activities, and

illegal campaigning. Voters were reportedly paid between 500 and 2,000 rubles (\$7.70 and \$31) to support ruling-party candidates in the municipal elections in Nizhny Novgorod, where opposition candidates also complained that the governor illegally campaigned via radio on election day. In Chelyabinsk management at local enterprises demanded, and then later verified, that their employees voted, while teachers working in polling stations required their students' parents to vote. There were also accusations that the system of "early," or absentee and at-home voting, was abused to secure victories for incumbent candidates.

Independent organizations and opposition figures faced harassment, particularly in Kostroma. Golos reported that the ruling United Russia party created a fake Golos website to post negative information about PARNAS' campaign in Kostroma. Security forces also barred entry to an office used by election observers from the Open Russia Foundation following the arrest of a staff member for allegedly transporting illicit funds. In addition, the Kostroma oblast election commission opened an investigation of opposition leader Aleksey Navalny for campaigning on election day.

Golos reported on the violation of observers' rights in several regions, particularly observers from opposition parties or media organizations. In Kazan, Tatarstan, one volunteer was called by his employer, urged to cease his observation activities, and leave the polling station. In the Moscow oblast, election officials, contrary to the law, banned the photography or filming of polling stations.

During the pre-election period, the government used "municipal filters" – a requirement that a candidate gather the support of 5 to 10 percent of municipal lawmakers, many of whom belonged to the United Russia party – to disqualify gubernatorial or regional legislative candidates from registering for the elections. The government also used other tactics to prevent a fair campaign environment, such as denying applications for opposition rallies, controlling opposition candidates' mass media coverage, and distributing gifts to potential voters to promote the victory of government-backed candidates in several regions.

Opposition candidates had difficulty accessing traditional media. Many opposition candidates relied on Facebook, Twitter, and VKontakte to connect with voters, since the state-controlled print and television media did not cover their campaigns.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The law requires political parties to have 500 members to register. Seventy-five parties successfully completed registration requirements and obtained the right to run in elections. On January 30, the Moscow City Court upheld the Ministry of Justice's decision not to include the Party of Progress on the register of parties eligible to participate in elections. The December 5 Party also attempted several times to receive official registration as a political party but remained unregistered.

While parties represented in the State Duma may nominate a presidential candidate without having to collect and submit signatures, prospective presidential candidates from parties without Duma representation must collect two million signatures from supporters throughout the country and submit the signatures to the Central Electoral Commission for certification. An independent candidate is ineligible to run if the commission finds more than 5 percent of the signatures to be invalid.

The law requires gubernatorial candidates not nominated by a registered political party to meet the "municipal filter" requirement. Such signatures of support must be collected in no fewer than 75 percent of municipal councils. Gubernatorial candidates nominated by registered political parties are not required to collect signatures from members of the public, although self-nominated candidates are.

Legislation passed in 2014 established a mixed electoral system in which half of the Duma deputies are elected in single-mandate constituencies and half are elected from party lists. The law also sets filters that prevent many small, legally registered parties from competing for party-list seats. Parties are exempt from collecting signatures to participate in elections if they have representation in the sitting Duma, received at least 3 percent of the national vote in the previous Duma election, or were represented in at least one regional legislature. Media outlets reported only 14 of the more than 70 registered political parties would be able to participate in the Duma elections under these rules. All other parties that wish to compete for party-list seats in the Duma must gather at least 200,000 signatures from voters, with no more than 7,000 signatures from any one region. Smaller parties could participate in single constituencies even if they were not from a registered political party, provided they collected at least 3 percent of the signatures of voters registered in their districts or at least 3,000 signatures, whichever number is higher. The new election format was scheduled to take effect during the next Duma election cycle in 2016.

The law prohibits negative campaigning and provides criteria for removing candidates from the ballot, including for vaguely defined "extremist" behavior. The executive branch and the prosecutor general have broad powers to regulate, investigate, and disqualify political parties. Other provisions limit campaign spending, set specific campaign periods, and provide for restrictions on campaign materials.

Once elected, many opposition politicians reported efforts by the ruling party to undermine their work or remove them from office. According to press reports, in the period 2007-11, approximately 90 percent of mayors elected from parties other than United Russia, or more than 20 individuals, were removed from office and prosecuted. For example, the trial of the former mayor of Yaroslavl, Yevgeniy Urlashov, a member of the opposition whom authorities arrested in 2013 on charges of embezzlement, began in September.

Local legislatures attempted at times to use laws allowing regional authorities to eliminate mayoral elections to deprive independent and opposition mayors of their positions. Deputies from the regional capital of Petrozavodsk laid the groundwork for the removal of mayor Galina Shirshina, supported by the Yabloko party, by presenting her with an "unsatisfactory" yearly evaluation (two unsatisfactory evaluations can lead to removal). In August the municipal legislature overrode Shirshina's veto to abolish direct mayoral elections and replaced them with a system in which municipal deputies appoint the mayor from a list of candidates selected by a special commission.

Leaders and members of opposition parties faced prosecution or other forms of retaliation. In the period preceding regional elections, several PARNAS party activists faced difficulties with authorities. In July, St. Petersburg's PARNAS leader, Andrey Pivovarov, was arrested for allegedly trying to purchase voters' personal information while campaigning in Kostroma and was held in pretrial detention until after the conclusion of elections.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Information on the ethnic composition of the State Duma and the Federation Council was not available. While members of national minorities took an active part in political life, ethnic Russians, who constituted approximately 80 percent of the population, dominated the political and administrative system, particularly at the federal level.

Section 4. Official Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government acknowledged difficulty enforcing the law effectively, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The *Global Competitiveness Report 2014-15* compiled by the World Economic Forum cited corruption as the most problematic, high-risk factor for doing business in the country. In

March the government passed a law reducing fines for receiving a bribe (from 25 times the size of the bribe down to 10 times) and for providing a bribe (from 15 times the size of the bribe down to five times).

Corruption was widespread throughout the executive branch, including within the security sector and migration management agencies, as well as the legislative and judicial branches at all levels of government. Its manifestations included bribery of officials, misuse of budgetary resources, theft of government property, kickbacks in the procurement process, extortion, and improper use of official position to secure personal profits. While there were prosecutions for bribery, a general lack of enforcement remained a problem. Official corruption continued to be rampant in numerous areas, including education, military conscription, health care, commerce, housing, social welfare, law enforcement, and the judicial system. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's 2013 Economic Survey of the country, cases against law enforcement officers accounted for a quarter of all corruption court cases in 2012, and 90 percent of entrepreneurs reported having encountered corruption at least once. The survey noted that "bribery in some regions is so widespread that local firms are reported to consider it a convenient alternative to legal and administrative compliance." According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the average bribe for all purposes during the year was approximately 208,000 rubles (\$3,200). According to a September report in the Russian daily newspaper *Izvestiya*, corruption increased 6.5 percent during the year, with an especially heavy concentration of cases in Pskov, the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Chelyabinsk, Mordovia, and Bashkortostan.

Corruption: Prosecutors charged high-level officials, including two regional governors, with corruption during the year. Media speculated that the removal from post of the governors of Sakhalin and Komi on charges of fraud and belonging to a criminal organization might reflect a new anticorruption campaign but also noted that corruption cases frequently were used for political reasons rather than part of an effort to root out corruption.

The areas of government spending that ranked highest in corruption were public procurement, media, national defense, and public utilities. The federal Investigative Committee estimated annual damages of 40 billion rubles (\$615 million) caused by corruption, although independent estimates put the figure much higher. On May 29, Investigative Committee spokesperson Vladimir Markin announced the committee opened more than 25,000 cases involving corruption in 2014. Of these, 40 percent were for bribery and included cases against 12 federal legislators and 435 local legislators. The Federal Security Service stated in February that five billion rubles (\$77 million) of defense spending was lost to corruption in 2014. The country's prosecutor general announced in July that 7.5 billion rubles (\$115 million) had been stolen during construction of the Far East Cosmodrome.

In apparent retaliation for his work exposing corruption, in August the Federal Tax Service inspected the office of anticorruption blogger and opposition leader Aleksey Navalny's Fund to Fight Corruption after he issued a report in August estimating the value of presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's wristwatch at more than 40 million rubles (\$615,000), well beyond his official means. A few weeks later, the fund publicly accused Peskov of honeymooning on a yacht that cost 350,000 euros (\$385,000) per week. In September tax authorities accused the fund of tax fraud.

Financial Disclosure: The law prohibits state officials and heads of state-owned enterprises from owning financial assets or bank accounts abroad. The law also requires politicians to file extensive declarations of all foreign real estate they own and civil servants to declare any large expenditure involving land, vehicles, and securities, as well as their incomes. These laws were unevenly enforced, and investigative bodies rarely acted upon media reports of undeclared assets held overseas and other alleged violations.

The law requires government officials to submit financial statements, restricts their employment at entities where they had prior connections, and requires reporting of actual or possible corrupt activity. The information that officials provided often did not reflect their true income or that of close family members.

Public Access to Information: The law authorizes public access to government information unless it is confidential or classified as a state secret. The law requires placement of information regarding activities of federal executive agencies on the internet. According to the watchdog site Infometer, government agencies frequently failed to implement the law. Federal agencies published on the internet only 40 percent of the required information, while regional governments published approximately 50 percent. Courts, despite the presumption of openness, denied citizens' requests for information on the grounds that the data requested did not directly affect their interests.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Domestic and international human rights groups operated in the country, investigating and publicly commenting on human rights problems. Official harassment of independent NGOs intensified, particularly of groups that focused on election monitoring, exposing corruption, and addressing human rights abuses. NGO activities and international humanitarian assistance in the North Caucasus were severely restricted. Some officials, including the ombudsman for human rights, Ella Pamfilova, regional ombudsman representatives, and the chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Council, Mikhail Fedotov, regularly interacted and cooperated with NGOs. Both Pamfilova and Fedotov were critical of the foreign agent and undesirable foreign organization laws (see section 2.b.).

The law regulating NGOs requires them to register with the Ministry of Justice. Authorities required NGOs to submit annual reports to the government that disclose sources of foreign funding and detailed information on how they used their funds. By law the Ministry of Justice can register NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in "political activity" as "foreign agents," a stigmatizing term that connotes treason or espionage. NGOs that engaged in political activities, activities that "pose a threat to the country," or activities that receive support from U.S. persons or organizations, are subject to suspension under the "Dima Yakovlev" law. The same law prohibits these NGOs from having dual-U.S. citizen members.

The government used the law on foreign agents to justify unannounced inspections of NGOs; threaten them with fines, liquidation, and prosecution; and demand that they self-register as a foreign agent or be added to the register unilaterally by the Ministry of Justice. By the end of the year, the Ministry of Justice had listed 111 NGOs as foreign agents, more than twice as many as were designated in 2014 (see section 2.b.).

The Ministry of Justice pursued efforts intended to discredit or curtail the activities of organizations and foreign agents. The Ministry of Justice attempted to force the closure of the Memorial Human Rights Center through an administrative case against it regarding the registration status for its regional branches; Memorial won an appeal to the Supreme Court in January. Despite the victory Memorial continued to be subject to legal harassment, including unannounced inspections and lengthy court appeals. In September authorities fined the center 300,000 rubles (\$4,600) for violating the foreign agent law by not disclosing its status on all published or distributed material. After an inspection of in November, the Ministry of Justice accused the NGO of "undermining the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, calling for the overthrow of the current government, a change of political regime in the country." The NGO

Committee against Torture elected to close in July after it was added to the foreign agent list and twice fined for violating the law (The organization later restructured itself.).

High-ranking officials often displayed a hostile attitude towards the activities of human rights organizations and suggested that their work was unpatriotic and detrimental to 'national security'. Interfax reported that Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, told media that the undesirable foreign organization law was created as a warning to domestic NGOs not to cooperate with foreign organizations that interfere in the country's internal affairs. Kosachev was the author of the *Patriotic Stop List*, the Federation Council's list of foreign organizations it proposed to be considered undesirable.

Kadyrov, the appointed leader of the Republic of Chechnya, frequently disparaged and threatened human rights activists. In June after a group of 3,000 persons raided and destroyed the Grozny office of the Committee against Torture, Kadyrov posted on social media that the NGO had "deliberately provoked the attack" in order to garner international media attention. Five individuals broke into the Grozny offices of the Memorial Human Rights Center and threw eggs at its employees. The intruders purportedly shouted, "You defend Igor' Kalyapin," the head of the Committee against Torture, as they hurled the eggs.

On multiple occasions President Putin warned the FSB against the "destructive purposes" of NGOs. The terms "foreign agent," "political agent," and "fifth column" were used in official speeches and publications to stigmatize NGOs, opposition politicians, and human rights activists.

Authorities continued to apply a number of indirect tactics to suppress or close domestic NGOs, including the application of various laws and harassment in the form of investigations and raids. They also employed laws on extremism and libel to restrict the activities of NGOs and criticism of the government (see sections 2.a. and 2.b). Authorities generally refused to cooperate with NGOs that were critical of their activities. International human rights NGOs had almost no presence east of the Urals. A few local NGOs addressed human rights problems in these regions but often chose not to work on politically sensitive topics to avoid retaliation by local authorities.

Authorities increased the amount of government funds available to support human rights NGOs to discourage access to foreign support. According to President Putin's address to the Presidential Human Rights Council in October, the government allocated 4.2 billion rubles (\$64.6 million) for NGO grants. The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman announced quarterly grants to various NGOs to support their domestic activities. Many NGOs on the foreign agent list noted that they were no longer receiving funding from the government as a result of the label, particularly NGOs that continued to accept foreign grants. Only three NGOs on the foreign agents list received presidential grants during the year.

On July 14, the Constitutional Court ruled the country is exempt from implementing ECHR rulings that violate the constitution. The court's decision was widely seen as related to the 2014 ECHR ruling that obligated the government to pay 1.9 billion euros (\$2.09 billion) to the shareholders of the defunct oil company Yukos. The former chief executive officer of the company, Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, was released in 2013 after a decade of politically motivated detention. In December, President Putin signed legislation allowing the Constitutional Court to determine whether or not judgments by international and regional courts, such as the ECHR, are constitutional.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Some government institutions continued to promote human rights and intervened in selected abuse complaints, despite widespread doubt as to their effectiveness.

Many observers did not consider the 126-member Public Chamber, composed of appointed members from civil society organizations, to be an effective check on the government. Some prominent human rights groups declined to participate in the chamber due to concern that the government would use it to increase control over civil society.

The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights is an advisory body to the president. The council was tasked with monitoring systemic problems in legislation and keeping track of individual human rights cases, developing proposals to submit to the president and government departments, and monitoring their implementation. Membership in the council increased at the end of 2012 from 40 to 65 members, with the president selecting the new members by decree. Human rights advocates expressed concern that the additions were made to increase progovernment membership and weaken the council. In June the council submitted a request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for protection for the head of the Committee against Torture, Igor' Kalyapin, after a mob of protesters destroyed the NGO's office in Chechnya.

Human Rights Ombudsman Ella Pamfilova commented publicly on a range of human rights problems, such as the foreign agent list, the undesirable foreign organization law, police violence, prison conditions, the treatment of children, and religious freedom. In May, Pamfilova's office released its own report on the state of human rights in the country, the first such report since she assumed her position in 2014. The 116-page report included input from human rights NGOs, although it was noted in the report that the ombudsman did not always agree with their assessments. The report raised the problems of mistreatment and killing of journalists, legal regulation of the internet, transparency of legal proceedings, the protection of human rights in penitentiaries – for both prisoners and staff – and the rights of prisoners with disabilities. The report also indicated problems that refugees from Ukraine encountered in Russia and violations of social and economic rights. Leaders of several human rights NGOs noted Pamfilova was generally effective as an official advocate for many of their concerns, despite her limited authority and a selective approach to the issues she took on.

The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office includes several specialized sections responsible for investigating complaints. According to the 2014 ombudsman's report, Pamfilova's office received 59,100 complaints from citizens, state organizations, and NGOs, representing a nearly 44 percent increase in complaints compared with 2013. All but six of the country's regions had regional ombudsmen with responsibilities similar to Pamfilova's. Their effectiveness varied significantly, and local authorities often undermined their independence. The regional ombudsman in St. Petersburg, Aleksandr Shishlov, was subjected to harassment by local media for attending a reception hosted by a foreign consulate in June. A report featuring Shishlov and other attendees of the reception was shown on a local St. Petersburg television station, questioning the patriotism of the guests and their purpose in meeting with foreign diplomats. In addition Shishlov received other threats and insults for his work with local officials to ensure that LGBTI activists would not be harassed during a planned event in the city.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, religion, beliefs, membership of public associations, or other circumstances. The law also protects various rights of persons with disabilities. Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, age, and HIV-status or other communicable diseases is not explicitly protected, although these categories could be construed as falling under "other circumstances." The government did not universally enforce prohibitions on discrimination.

During the year hostile rhetoric and propaganda against some groups disseminated through state-run media outlets contributed to discrimination and xenophobia.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal, and the law provides the same punishment for a relative, including the spouse, who commits rape as for a nonrelative. Rape victims may act as full legal parties in criminal cases brought against alleged assailants and may seek compensation as part of a court verdict without initiating a separate civil action. While members of the medical profession assisted assault survivors and sometimes helped identify an assault or rape case, doctors were often reluctant to provide testimony in court.

The penalty for rape is three to six years' imprisonment for a single offender and four to 10 years if a group of persons commits the crime or the assailant had prior convictions for sexual assault. Violations are punishable by eight to 15 years in prison if the victim was between the ages of 14 and 18 and by 12 to 20 years in prison if the victim died or was under 14. According to NGOs many law enforcement personnel and prosecutors did not consider spousal or acquaintance rape a priority and did not encourage reporting or prosecuting such cases. NGOs reported that local police officers sometimes refused to respond to rape or domestic violence calls unless the victim's life was directly threatened.

According to NGOs many women did not report rape or other violence, especially when committed by spouses, due to social stigma and the lack of government support.

Domestic violence remained a major problem. There is no significant domestic violence provision in the criminal code and no legal definition of domestic violence. The laws that address bodily harm are general in nature and do not permit police to initiate a criminal investigation unless the victim files a complaint. The burden of collecting evidence in such cases typically falls on the alleged victims. Federal law prohibits battery, assault, threats, and killing, but most acts of domestic violence did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Prosecutor's Office. According to NGOs police were often unwilling to register complaints of domestic violence and frequently discouraged victims from submitting them.

The government does not gather comprehensive data on domestic violence, but 2013 statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs showed that, while women were the victims of 43 percent of all crimes, they were the victims of crimes committed in the home (63 percent), among family members (73 percent), and by a spouse (91 percent) at disproportionately high rates. In a poll conducted in March in the Karelian republic, more than half the respondents indicated they had heard of recent cases or had personally been the victim of domestic violence. Respondents' references to domestic violence included cases of physical (35 percent), psychological (37 percent), and sexual (3 percent) abuse. The similarly reported that a third of women throughout the country were subject to physical spousal violence.

The NGO Center for Women's Support asserted that a majority of domestic violence cases filed with authorities were either dismissed on technical grounds or transferred to a reconciliation process conducted by a justice of the peace, whose focus was on preserving the family rather than punishing the perpetrator. Civil remedies for domestic violence include administrative fines and divorce. Physical harm, property, and family rights cases, such as divorce, asset division, and child custody, cannot be heard in the same case or the same court.

According to the ANNA Center, the government operated 23 women's shelters across the country.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is not specifically prohibited in the criminal code. Local NGOs in Dagestan reported that FGM/C was occasionally practiced in some villages in the republic.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: According to human rights groups, so-called honor killings of women in Chechnya, Dagestan, and elsewhere in the North Caucasus district continued. Human rights groups further reported that so-called honor killings were underreported and rarely prosecuted because of community collusion to cover up such crimes, although there were instances in which such killings led to convictions. According to *Caucasian Knot*, a man accused of strangling to death his 21-year-old daughter in 2013 because he believed that her communications with men had brought shame to the family, was convicted in April and sentenced to seven years in prison.

In some parts of the North Caucasus, women continued to face bride kidnapping, polygamy, forced marriage (including child marriage), legal discrimination, and enforced adherence to Islamic dress codes. The Heinrich Boell Foundation reported in May that husbands frequently controlled women by not allowing them access to the family budget and threatening to keep them from communicating with their friends and families.

There were cases in some parts of the North Caucasus where men, claiming that kidnapping brides was an ancient local tradition, reportedly abducted and raped young women, in some cases forcing them into marriage. In February police ceased an investigation into a 17-year-old girl's abduction for marriage in Dagestan after they determined that she had gone willingly. Police in Dagestan claimed that many cases of women being abducted were in fact voluntary. NGOs reported that, while the overwhelming majority of bride kidnappings were not voluntary, women in the North Caucasus sometimes agreed to be abducted to avoid an arranged marriage, often to an older man or to a man with multiple wives.

Sexual Harassment: The law does not specifically prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace, which remained a widespread problem. Instead, the criminal code contains a general provision against compelling a person to perform actions of a sexual character by means of blackmail, threats, or by taking advantage of the victim's economic or other dependence on the perpetrator. As of April there had been no successful prosecutions for "compulsion to perform sexual actions."

Reproductive Rights: The government recognizes the basic right of couples and individuals to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so. While there are no legal restrictions on access to contraceptives, the Russian Orthodox Church and Muftis Council continued their opposition to family planning initiatives, and access to family planning in the country was limited, especially outside of big cities. Senior government leaders explicitly encouraged women to have as many children as possible to counteract the country's declining population, particularly among ethnic Russians.

Discrimination: The constitution and law provide that men and women enjoy the same legal status and rights under family, labor, property, and inheritance law and in the judicial system. Men and women have an equal right to obtain a bank loan, but women often encountered significant restrictions. There were reports that women encountered discrimination in employment (see section 7.d.).

The law upholds equal ownership rights for women and men. The civil code provides equal rights to access to land and access to other property for men and women. Unless their marriage contract states otherwise, all property acquired during a marriage is the couple's joint property, and it is divided into two equal shares in the event of divorce. Each spouse retains ownership and management of property acquired before marriage or inherited after marriage.

Traditional legal practices in the North Caucasus award the husband custody of children and all property in divorce cases. As a result women in the region were often unwilling to seek divorce, even in cases of abuse.

Children

Birth Registration: By law citizenship derives from parents at birth or from birth within the country's territory if the parents are unknown or if the child cannot claim the parents' citizenship. Newborns generally were registered at the local civil registry office where the parents live. A parent must apply for registration within one month of the birth. Birth certificates were issued on the basis of the medical certificate of the hospital where a baby was born.

Education: Education is free and compulsory through grade 11. Regional authorities frequently denied school access to the children of persons who were not registered as residents of the locality, including Roma, asylum seekers, and migrant workers.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was a significant problem. The Ministry of Internal Affairs published data on 576,000 criminal proceedings filed against parents in 2014 for crimes against children. These included 440,000 cases of negligence, 1,400 for enabling alcohol or drug abuse, and 11,900 cases of physical child abuse, which resulted in more than 2,500 fatalities. In addition, 946 of these crimes were cases of pedophilia, 380 of which a parental guardian committed, according to the ombudsman for children's rights, Pavel Astakhov.

According to a 2011 report published by the NGO Foundation for Assistance to Children in Difficult Life Situations, 2,000 to 2,500 children died annually from domestic violence. A 2013 estimate by the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicated that one in four children in the country was subjected to parental or foster abuse.

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 for both men and women. Local authorities may authorize marriage from the age of 16 under certain circumstances, and even earlier in some regions. In May, *Novaya Gazeta* reported that a 17-year-old girl had been pressured into marrying the 57-year-old police chief in Chechnya's Nozhai-Yurt district, who was already married. Chechen leader Kadyrov attended the wedding while Ombudsman Astakhov publicly defended such practices in the Caucasus.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: See information for girls under 18 in women's section above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The age of consent is 16. Children, particularly orphans and those without homes, were exploited for child pornography. While authorities considered child pornography to be a serious problem, the law does not define child pornography, criminalize its possession, or provide for effective investigation and prosecution of it. The law prohibits the manufacture, distribution, and possession with intent to distribute of child pornography, but possession without intent to distribute is not prohibited by law. Manufacture and distribution of pornography involving children under 18 is punishable by two to 10 years in prison, or three to 15 years in prison if it involves children under 14. Courts often dismissed criminal cases, however, because of the lack of clear standards or definitions.

According to Ministry of Internal Affairs statistics, in 2014 the ministry opened 274 investigative cases into child pornography and referred 80 of these to the courts. In addition to its authority to regulate websites containing extremist materials, Roskomnadzor has the power to shut down any website immediately without due process until its owners prove its content does not include child pornography. In 2014, 15 percent of the 45,700 links Roskomnadzor shut down were related to child pornography.

Displaced Children: Official statistics on the numbers of orphans and displaced children in the country were conflicting and of questionable reliability. In 2014 the Ministry of Education and Science estimated there were approximately 96,000 orphans in the country, down from a previous estimate of 120,000. Ombudsman Astakhov announced in May that the number of orphans without parental supervision had declined from 106,700 in 2009 to 61,600 in 2014. In March, Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets announced there were 53,100 homeless children who had run away from home in 2014, a 22 percent increase over 2013. No recent official statistics on the number of parentless migrants were available. A 2011 study conducted by the Ministry of Education's Center for Sociological Research indicated that 45 percent of homeless and unaccompanied children in Moscow were migrant children from member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Homeless children often engaged in criminal activities, received no education, and were vulnerable to substance abuse. Some children on the streets were forced into prostitution. Law enforcement officials reportedly abused street children, blamed them for unsolved crimes, and committed illegal acts against them, including extortion, detention, and psychological and sexual violence.

Regional ombudsmen for children operated in all the country's regions. They had the authority to conduct independent investigations relating to the violation of children's rights, inspect all institutions and executive offices dealing with minors, establish councils of public experts, and conduct independent evaluations of legislation affecting children. A number of schools in the Moscow and Volgograd oblasts had school ombudsmen to deal with children and families and identify potential conflicts and violations of children's rights.

Institutionalized Children: In April media reported that an orphanage in Moscow had sent children to a psychiatric hospital, allegedly as punishment for misbehavior and without demonstrating any clinical justification. One of the minors who was committed took photographs of teenagers tying a younger child to a bed, while others were allegedly forced to take drugs without a proper diagnosis. Subsequent reporting by the online newspaper *Meduza* in May indicated that such practices were widespread throughout the country, with reports of 652 similar cases in four separate regions since 2010.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html and country-specific information at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/russia.html.

Anti-Semitism

The 2010 census estimated the Jewish population at just more than 150,000. In February the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, however, stated that the actual Jewish population was nearly one million.

Opinion polling data showed a low but consistent percentage of the general population agreed with anti-Semitic statements. A Levada Center poll published in August reported 7 percent of respondents believed Jews should have a limited presence in Russia. The poll was conducted on August 7-10 and had a margin of error of 3.5 percent.

On July 16, an unknown assailant shot Sergey Ustinov, the founder and director of the Museum of the History of Jews in Russia, in the head with a pneumatic pistol outside his office in Moscow. Ustinov survived the shooting. Although the motive for the attack was unknown, media speculated that anti-Semitism might have played a role.

In March unidentified individuals desecrated a monument in Volgograd marking the site of a mass execution of Jews by the Nazis during World War II. The monument had previously suffered similar defacements.

In May and June prosecutors conducted surprise inspections of multiple Jewish schools. The Prosecutor's Office of the Kirov district of Yekaterinburg removed textbooks from the Or Avner School to check for any signs of extremism. In Novgorod educational materials were also seized. According to Russian Jewish Congress president Yuri Kanner, his organization was not able to obtain clarifications from authorities on either action.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts or slogans during nationalist demonstrations. The Russian Jewish Congress blamed the government for allowing ultranationalist groups to hold conferences and spread their ideology.

The government investigated anti-Semitic crimes, and some courts placed anti-Semitic literature on the Ministry of Justice's list of banned extremist materials.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's [*Trafficking in Persons Report*](#).

Persons with Disabilities

While several laws prohibit discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, transportation, access to health care, and the provision of state services, the government generally did not enforce these laws. No laws prohibit discrimination in air travel.

Persons with disabilities continued to face discrimination and denial of equal access to education, employment, and social institutions. Persons with mental disabilities were subject to severe discrimination in education and employment (see section 7.d.). In addition the conditions of guardianship imposed by courts deprived them of almost all personal rights. Under the family code, individuals with mental disabilities were at times prevented from getting married without a guardian's consent.

In August, Russian model Natalia Vodianova drew attention to the rights of persons with disabilities after her sister was forced to leave a Nizhny Novgorod cafe by the owner, who allegedly accused her of scaring customers away. Vodianova's 27-year-old sister, who had autism and cerebral palsy, was at the cafe with a personal assistant when the owner and a security guard threatened them and told them to leave the premises. The incident drew widespread public attention after Vodianova posted the details on her social media site. As a result the Investigative Committee closed the cafe and launched an investigation of the incident. In September the Avtozavodskiy District Court of Nizhny Novgorod dropped criminal charges against the cafe owner after a settlement was reached with the family.

Conditions in institutions for adults with disabilities were often poor, with unqualified staff and overcrowding. Institutions rarely attempted to develop the abilities of residents, whom they frequently confined to the premises and whose movements they sometimes restricted within the institutions themselves.

Federal law requires that buildings be accessible to persons with disabilities, but authorities did not enforce the law, and many buildings were not accessible. In a 2013 report, HRW noted that in apartment buildings constructed before 2001 (i.e., prior to the development of minimum accessibility standards for new construction), doorways and elevators were too narrow for

wheelchairs and buildings lacked elevators or appropriate ramps. In some cases buildings constructed after 2001 also lacked these accommodations. This lack of building access was an insurmountable barrier to employment, education, and social engagement for the vast majority of wheelchair users interviewed in the report. The report also noted that critical public facilities and emergency services remained largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities.

According to HRW disability rights activists were unable to attend a meeting with the head of the Kirov oblast and other officials in September, since the government building where the meeting was to take place was neither wheelchair accessible nor in compliance with federal law.

In March the Presidential Human Rights Council expressed deep concern to the Ministry of Finance regarding sharp reductions in public funding of socially oriented nonprofit organizations. Due to economic difficulties, the Ministry of Finance reduced the original 750-million-ruble (\$11.5 million) budget allocation by 10 percent.

Because only 3 percent of schools could accommodate them, most children with disabilities could not study in their communities and were isolated from other community members. According to a 2014 HRW report, nearly 30 percent of all children with disabilities lived in state orphanages, where they faced violence and neglect. Some children interviewed by HRW reported that orphanage staff beat them, injected them with sedatives, and sent them to psychiatric hospitals for days or weeks at a time to control or punish them.

HRW reported that at least 95 percent of children living in orphanages and foster care had at least one living parent, although children with disabilities who entered institutions at a young age were unlikely to return to their birth families as a result of the practice of local-level state commissions to recommend continued institutionalization of children. Staff working in institutions HRW visited occasionally discouraged visits with families or other contact with family members, claiming that such contact "spoiled" children by getting them accustomed to too much attention. Within orphanages, HRW documented the segregation of children whom staff deemed to have the most "severe" disabilities into "lying-down" rooms, where they were confined to cribs and often tied to furniture with rags. Many of these children received little attention except for feeding and diaper changing.

While only 2 to 3 percent of children in the country had a disability, according to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, more than 45 percent of the country's total population of children with disabilities was institutionalized. Despite a 2013 law that mandates inclusive education for children with disabilities, authorities generally segregated them from mainstream society through a system that institutionalized them through adulthood. Graduates of such institutions often lacked the necessary social, educational, and vocational skills to function in society. The disability rights NGO Perspektiva conducted an annual national competition for the country's "best inclusive school." Perspektiva received more than 400 applications during the year, a more than fourfold increase from 2014.

There were numerous cases of child abuse in state facilities. HRW documented a case in June in which an orphan from the city of Volzhsk was tied with tape to a bar and beaten on his head and legs as punishment for disobedience. The teacher was fined 10,000 rubles (\$154) for her actions.

There appeared to be no legal mechanism by which individuals could contest their assignment to a facility for persons with disabilities. The classification of children with mental disabilities to categories of disability often followed them through their lives. The official designations "imbecile" and "idiot," assigned by a commission that assesses children with developmental problems at the age of three, signify that authorities consider a child to be uneducable. These designations were almost always irrevocable. The designation "weak" (having a slight cognitive or

intellectual disability) followed an individual on official documents, creating barriers to employment and housing after graduation from state institutions.

In September, *The Moscow Times* newspaper reported the case of an autistic man who was committed against his will to a care home at the age of 28 by his aunt. The man spent four years in the facility before his girlfriend was able to secure his release by obtaining guardianship over him. During his time in the facility, he was forced to take medication he did not require and endure prison-like conditions.

Election laws do not specifically mandate that polling places be accessible to persons with disabilities, and the majority of polling stations were not. Election officials generally brought mobile ballot boxes to the homes of voters with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination based on nationality, but government officials increasingly subjected minorities to discrimination. According to SOVA, a human rights NGO, as of August racial violence resulted in the death of at least five persons, while 47 others were injured and four received death threats. Incidents were reported in 12 regions, although the violence tended to be concentrated in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Skinhead groups and other extreme nationalist organizations fomented racially motivated violence. Racist propaganda remained a problem, although courts continued to convict individuals of using propaganda to incite ethnic hatred.

Compared with previous years, there were fewer reports of skinhead violence. The Ministry of Justice added a number of skinhead videos found on social media, as well as skinhead publications, to the Federal List of Extremist Materials. In an August report documenting xenophobia and nationalism in the country during the first half of the year, SOVA found that increasing law enforcement pressure on nationalist groups translated into drastically lower levels of their public activity. The number of marches and rallies decreased significantly during the year, while the number of attendees decreased by more than half.

Nationalist organizations held a number of rallies throughout the year. On March 15, nationalist groups organized a "day of Russian solidarity" in at least 19 cities, although attendance was generally low. Two events were scheduled in Moscow for May 1 to mark the "Russian May 1," but one was cancelled due to the detention of the main organizer. The Russian National Front held a second event with approximately 170 participants.

In March the country hosted the International Russian Conservative Forum in St. Petersburg, which featured speakers and participants from radical nationalist and neo-Nazi groups across Europe. The forum was organized by the "Motherland" ("Rodina") party and the Russian National Cultural Center's "People's House" ("Narodnyy Dom").

There were indications of a growing number of anti-Roma incidents. Police in Tula Oblast monitored Romani gathering spots to prevent possible outbreaks of interethnic hostility. In June a security guard at a Moscow store reportedly used a stun gun against a seven-year-old Romani boy that the guard suspected of stealing goods. While the ombudsman for children's rights, Pavel Astakhov, expressed outrage at the attack, there were no reports of any legal action taken against the guard.

In some cases authorities held perpetrators responsible for xenophobic violence, and there were at least 12 convictions for such acts as of July. According to SOVA the number of convictions for violent xenophobic crimes stayed at the previous year's level, marking an end to a downward trend in convictions. Members of the neo-Nazi group Piranha-74 were among those convicted of racist violence in the Rostov and Chelyabinsk oblasts in February. On March 31, a Moscow court

convicted four members of the Combat Organization of Russian Nationalists (BORN) on charges including murder motivated by ethnic hatred. The former leader of BORN, Il'ya Goryachev, was convicted of five killings and organizing an armed extremist group. On July 24, he was sentenced to life in prison.

Police and migration officials continued to engage in anti-immigrant raids in markets, factories, the subway, and city streets. Several vigilante organizations in St. Petersburg held regular raids throughout the year targeting suspected irregular migrants. The National Socialist Initiative (NSI) headed by Dmitry Bobrov held "Russian cleaning" events in April, June, July, and August. In the first event, NSI members sought out immigrants selling vegetables and fish on the street and turned them over to police. The remaining events followed a similar pattern, wherein members visited shops and markets where they claimed irregular migrants were working or selling products. Another organization called "Russians" worked with police and members of the St. Petersburg Ministry of Interior's special task force on extremism to carry out a raid on various kiosks near metro stops.

Indigenous People

The constitution and various statutes provide support for so-called "small-numbered" indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, permitting them to create self-governing bodies and allowing them to seek compensation if economic development threatens their lands. The government granted the status of "indigenous" and associated benefits only to those ethnic groups numbering less than 50,000 and maintaining their traditional way of life. Small-numbered indigenous groups throughout the country (including the Udege in the Far East, the Khanty in Siberia, and the Chukchi in the North) continued to work actively to preserve and defend their cultures as well as their right to benefit from the economic resources in their regions. The majority of small-numbered indigenous communities believed that a combination of overlapping legal codes and authorities' lack of political will to enforce existing laws prevented them from fully exercising their rights.

Most members of indigenous communities asserted that they received the same treatment as ethnic Russians, although some more vocal activists claimed they were either unrepresented or underrepresented in regional governments.

The Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), the country's largest NGO for indigenous people, represented 41 groups spread across the country with approximately 250,000 members. In 2013 pressure from the government led to a political purge of RAIPON's leadership and the election of a president who was a Duma member from the ruling United Russia party. Leading indigenous figures, such as Rodion Sulyandziga, the former first vice president of RAIPON, stated the government failed to address seriously the problems of indigenous communities in recent decades.

Small-numbered indigenous groups also expressed concern that they lacked adequate representation in the federal government. During the year responsibility for indigenous problems was shifted from the Ministry of Culture to the newly created Federal Agency for Nationalities.

Indigenous contacts also reported an increase in state-sponsored harassment, including interrogations by the security services, as well as employment discrimination (see section 7.d.). Ethnic Finno-Ugric groups (not all of which qualify as indigenous under the law) faced allegations of promoting separatism in state-sponsored media, and the local NGO Young Karelia, which seeks to promote the Karelian culture and language, was added to the list of "foreign agents" in June.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

A 2013 law criminalizes the "propaganda" of nontraditional sexual relations to minors. The law effectively limits the rights of free expression and assembly for citizens who wish to advocate publicly for rights or express the opinion that homosexuality is normal. Examples of what the government considered LGBTI propaganda included materials that "directly or indirectly approve of persons who are in nontraditional sexual relationships." Antidiscrimination laws exist but do not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

During the year there were reports of killings motivated by the sexual orientation of the victim. In one case two men confessed to killing a gay man in the Vsevolozhskiy district outside St. Petersburg on February 23. The two attackers reportedly stabbed the man repeatedly after he allegedly sexually harassed them. No information was available regarding any official action taken against the attackers.

Human rights groups reported continuing violence against LGBTI individuals. Openly gay men were particular targets of attacks, and police often failed to respond. In July several young men conducted a social experiment in which they secretly videotaped themselves walking around Moscow while holding hands. The publicly available video of the experiment showed the men being verbally and physically assaulted multiple times by passersby.

LGBTI activists experienced threats and attacks in public. Police were often unwilling to assist, and victims sometimes chose not to report crimes for this reason as well as due to concerns about retaliation. On August 18, unknown assailants attacked LGBTI activist Irina Fedotova-Fet near her home in Moscow. The attackers shouted epithets referring to her sexuality during the attack, which left her cut and bruised.

On April 13, assailants sprayed an odorous gas into the Maximum Center for Social, Psychological, and Legal Assistance to Victims of Homophobia and Discrimination in Murmansk, causing choking and vomiting among those in the office. Police refused to open a criminal investigation. In July a lawyer for one of the victims filed a legal complaint of police inaction.

There were reports that authorities targeted NGOs and activists representing the LGBTI community for retaliation. LGBTI rights activist Aleksandr Ermoshkin suffered a head injury during an assault in May at a LGBTI rights demonstration in Khabarovsk. According to HRW, Ermoshkin was also forced to resign from his position as a schoolteacher shortly after the country enacted the 2013 law banning propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors. In June a nationally televised story on the state-owned Russia-1 channel accused him of collaborating with foreign intelligence services during a meeting arranged by the television station with reporters posing as representatives of a foreign embassy in Moscow.

LGBTI persons reported heightened societal stigma and discrimination, which some attributed to increasing official promotion of intolerance and homophobia. Activists asserted that the majority of LGBTI persons hid their sexual orientation or gender identity due to fear of losing their jobs or homes as well as the threat of violence. Medical practitioners reportedly continued to limit or deny LGBTI persons health services due to intolerance and prejudice. There were reports that employment discrimination against LGBTI persons increased (see section 7.d.) and that LGBTI persons were increasingly seeking asylum abroad due to the domestic environment.

There were reports that authorities harassed venues frequented by LGBTI persons. On February 26, police raided the lesbian nightclub Infinity in St. Petersburg, purportedly due to reports of drug use and minors being present. Earlier in the month, Kseniya Infinity, one of the owners of the club, had intentionally taken a picture of herself kissing her partner with antigay St. Petersburg assemblyman Vitaliy Milonov in the background. After the picture was posted online, Milonov threatened to close the club.

In Moscow authorities refused to allow a gay pride parade for the 10th consecutive year, despite a 2010 ECHR ruling that the denial violated the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom from discrimination, and otherwise violated free expression, association, and assembly rights of LGBTI persons.

On October 2, the LGBT Sports Federation, a nationwide network of organizations promoting athletic engagement for LGBTI individuals, held the opening of the fifth annual athletic event, Together in Sport, outside Moscow. In September, St. Petersburg's seventh annual Queer Festival of Russia drew more than 2,500 live and online spectators. Despite last-minute venue cancellations prior to both of these events, they were allowed to proceed with far less outside interference than in 2014. Activists noted the government's strategy involved limiting such events' exposure to the broader public rather than banning or severely interfering with them.

Although the law allows transgender individuals to change their names and gender classifications on government documents, they faced difficulties because the government had not established standard procedures and many civil registry offices denied their requests. When their documents failed to reflect their gender accurately, transgender persons often faced discrimination in accessing health care, education, housing, and employment.

A homophobic campaign continued in the state-controlled media, in which officials, journalists, and others called LGBTI persons "perverts," "sodomites," and "abnormal," and conflated homosexuality with pedophilia.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Persons with HIV/AIDS faced significant legal discrimination, informal stigma-based barriers, and employment discrimination (see section 7.d.); and were prohibited from adopting children. In addition those who were intravenous drug users in particular faced informal barriers to accessing antiretroviral treatment. Regional AIDS centers often demanded that drug users complete drug addiction treatment, which was severely lacking or nonexistent in most areas, before starting antiretroviral treatment. According to NGO activists, men who have sex with men were discouraged from seeking antiretroviral treatment, since treatment exposes the fact that these individuals have the virus, while sex workers were afraid to appear in the official system due to threats from law enforcement bodies. Economic migrants also concealed their HIV status and avoided treatment due to fear of deportation. By law foreign citizens who are HIV-positive may be deported. On March 16, the Supreme Court ruled that HIV-positive foreigners who are closely related to Russian citizens should not be deported in order to keep families together. On December 30, the government enacted a law barring the deportation of HIV-positive foreigners who have a Russian national or permanent resident spouse, child (including adopted children), or parents (including adopted parents). The new law preserves the legal ability to deport other HIV-positive foreigners.

Prisoners with HIV/AIDS experienced regular abuse and denial of medical treatment.

Although the law provides for treatment of HIV-positive persons, drug shortages, legal barriers, and lack of funds caused large gaps in treatment. Regional AIDS centers continued to force patients to take "vacations" from antiretrovirals for three months due to drug shortages, according to the NGO Patients Control. On September 10, a Moscow court ruled that the Moscow AIDS Center could refuse to provide antiretrovirals to temporary residents in Moscow. According to NGOs temporary residents were often told to return to their location of permanent residency for treatment (changing one's permanent residence is administratively difficult and often requires property ownership or family ties).

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

The lack of an internal passport often prevented homeless citizens from fully securing their legal rights and social services. Homeless persons faced barriers to obtaining legal documentation.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides that workers may form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination, but it does not require employers to reinstate workers fired due to their union activity. The law prohibits reprisals against striking workers. Unions must register with the Federal Registration Service. The law requires labor unions to be independent of government bodies, employers, political parties, and NGOs.

The law places several restrictions on the right to bargain collectively. For example, only one collective bargaining agreement is permitted per enterprise, and only a union or group of unions representing at least half the workforce may bargain collectively. The law does not specify who may be given authority to bargain collectively when there is no trade union in an enterprise.

Government policy limited the exercise of freedom of association and collective bargaining. The law imposes some limits on the right to strike. The labor code prohibits strikes in the military and emergency response services. It also prohibits strikes in essential public service sectors, including utilities and transportation, and strikes that would threaten the country's defense and safety, or the life and health of its workers. The law also prohibits some nonessential public servants from striking and imposes compulsory arbitration for railway, postal, and municipal workers as well as other public servants in roles other than law enforcement. Solidarity strikes and strikes on issues related to state policies are illegal, as are strikes that do not respect the onerous time limits, procedures, and requirements mandated by law. In the event a declared strike continues after it is ruled illegal, courts may confiscate union property to cover employers' losses.

The Federal Labor and Employment Service (RosTrud) regulates compliance of employers with all elements of labor law and has responsibility to "control and supervise employers for their compliance with the labor legislation and other legal acts which deal with labor norms." State agencies responsible for enforcing the law, however, frequently failed to fulfill their responsibilities, and violations of freedom of association were common. Registering unions, for example, was often a cumbersome process, including lengthy delays and convoluted bureaucracy.

Discrimination against employees and trade union leaders due to their union membership was common, as was pressure against workers to leave, or not to join, unions. Labor activists reported police regularly intimidated union supporters, including by subjecting them to detention and extensive interrogations and provoking physical confrontations with them.

Employers frequently engaged in reprisals against workers for union activity, including threatening to assign them to night shifts, denying benefits, and blacklisting or firing them. Although unions were occasionally successful in court, in most cases company managers who engaged in antiunion activities did not face penalties.

Extensive legal requirements complicated workers' abilities to exercise the right to strike. According to the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, the legal preparation for a strike takes at least 40 days.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits most forms of forced or compulsory labor but allows for compulsory labor as a penal sentence, in some cases as labor contracted to private enterprises. The government did not effectively enforce such laws.

Men and women were engaged in forced labor in the construction industry, textile shops, and agricultural sector (see section 7.c.). Under a state-to-state agreement in effect since 2009, North Korean citizens worked in the country in a variety of sectors, including the logging and construction industries in the Far East. Observers continued to believe that many of these workers were subjected to conditions of forced labor. In cases where these workers claimed asylum in Russia, they were processed through UNHCR. The Federal State Statistics Service, citing FMS numbers, registered 30,000 North Korean workers as of June.

In the first half of the year, the Ministry of Internal Affairs registered 262 cases of unlawful deprivation of liberty, human trafficking, or using slave labor.

Also see the Department of State's [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children under age 16 in most cases and regulates the working conditions of children under 18, including the prohibition of dangerous nighttime and overtime work. The law permits children to work at 14 under certain conditions and with the approval of a parent or guardian. Such work must not threaten the child's health or welfare. The labor code lists occupations that are restricted for children under 18, including work in unhealthy or dangerous conditions, underground work, or jobs that might endanger a child's health and moral development.

RosTrud is responsible for inspecting enterprises and organizations to identify violations of labor and occupational health standards for minors. Typical violations of child labor laws were classified as administrative violations and were punished with fines.

The most recent data available indicated that in 2013 RosTrud inspected 2,400 organizations and found 1,990 child labor violations, down 20 percent compared with 2012. Information on penalties assessed during the year was not available.

In urban areas children worked primarily in the construction and informal sectors, engaging in retail services, selling goods on the street, washing cars, and making deliveries. In rural areas children worked in agriculture. Some children, both Russian and foreign, were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation (see section 6, Children).

Also see the Department of Labor's [Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor](#).

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits employment discrimination based on sex, race, skin color, nationality, language, origins, property, social status or position, age, domicile, religious beliefs, political convictions, affiliation or nonaffiliation with public associations, and other factors not relevant to the professional qualities of the employee. It also requires equal pay for equal work. The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Employment laws were not always effectively enforced, and penalties for violations were insufficient to deter employers from violating the law.

Discrimination based on gender in compensation, professional training, hiring, and dismissal were characteristic of the labor market. Employers often preferred to hire men to save on maternity and

child-care costs and avoid the perceived unreliability associated with women with small children. Such discrimination was often very difficult to prove, although NGOs reported several successful lawsuits in St. Petersburg against companies for wrongful termination of women on maternity leave.

A 2013 law prohibits employer discrimination in posting job vacancy information. It also prohibits employers from requesting workers with specific gender, race, nationality, address registration, age, and other factors unrelated to personal skills and competencies. Notwithstanding the law, vacancy announcements continued to specify gender and age requirements, and some also specified a desired physical appearance and preference for applicants who were open to intimate relations with their prospective supervisors.

The labor code restricts women's employment in jobs with "harmful or dangerous conditions or work underground, except in nonphysical jobs or sanitary and consumer services," and forbids women's employment in "manual handling of bulk weights that exceed the set limits for their handling." According to the NGO St. Petersburg Aegis, the law resulted in authorities compiling a list of 456 occupations from which it is legal to exclude women, including those of diver, paratrooper, and firefighter. The World Economic Forum's 2015 Global Gender Gap Report, based on 'the country's Annual Statistics Report, documented a widespread gender pay gap and noted that women predominated in low-paying jobs in education and the medical industry and in low-level sales positions. On average women earned 38 percent less than men, notwithstanding that 85 percent of women had completed some form of higher education, compared with 68 percent of men.

Persons with disabilities were subject to employment discrimination. A 2013 federal law remained in force that allowed regional governments to set quotas for employment of persons with disabilities. Companies with 35 to 100 employees have a quota of 1 to 3 percent, while those with more than 100 employees have a 2 to 4 percent quota. Some local authorities and private employers continued to discourage persons with disabilities from working; the only penalty for failure to honor quotas, if enforced, was a small fine of 5,000 to 10,000 rubles (\$77 to \$154).

Indigenous peoples faced employment discrimination. Those employed at schools or in local governments felt pressure not to engage in political activism, fearing they could lose their jobs for doing so.

Employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity was a problem, especially in the public sector and education. Employers fired LGBTI persons for their sexual orientation, gender identity, or public activism in support of LGBTI rights. If they expected to be fired, some LGBTI persons chose to resign preemptively in order to avoid having their future prospects hindered by a dismissal on their resumes. Primary and secondary school teachers were often the targets of such pressure, due to the law's focus on so-called "propaganda" targeted at minors (see also section 6).

In April a St. Petersburg court ruled against Alvetina, a music teacher, who was fired from her job teaching students with disabilities in December 2014 after a picture of her kissing another woman was posted online by an antigay activist. In its April decision, the court rejected her request to be reinstated.

Persons with HIV/AIDS were prohibited from working in some areas of medical research and medicine.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The subsistence minimum income used by the government as the official poverty line was 10,017 rubles (\$154.11) per month in the second quarter of the year. The national minimum wage for all sectors was 5,965 rubles (\$92) per month, which was 60 percent of the subsistence minimum. According to the Federal Statistics Service, in the first half of the year, the portion of the population living below the subsistence minimum increased to 15.1 percent from 13.1 percent in the same period of 2014.

The labor code contains provisions for standard work hours, overtime, and annual leave. The standard workweek cannot exceed 40 hours. Employers may not request overtime work from pregnant women, workers under the age of 18, and other categories of employees specified by federal laws. Standard annual paid leave is 28 calendar days. Employees who perform work involving harmful or dangerous labor conditions and employees in the Far North regions receive additional annual paid leave. Organizations have discretion to grant additional leave to employees.

The labor code stipulates that payment for overtime must be at least 150 percent for the first two hours and not less than 200 percent after that. At an employee's request, overtime may be compensated by additional holiday leave. Overtime work cannot exceed four hours in a two-day period or 120 hours in a year for each employee. The law establishes minimum conditions for workplace safety and worker health but does not explicitly allow workers to remove themselves from hazardous workplaces without threat to their employment. The law entitles foreigners working legally in the country to the same rights and protections as citizens.

The government did not effectively enforce these laws in either the formal or informal sectors. Nonpayment of wages is treated as a criminal offense and is punishable by fines, compulsory labor, and/or imprisonment. The threshold for a criminal offense is partial nonpayment (i.e., nonpayment of more than half of the employee's wages) for three months or complete nonpayment for two months. Aggravated offenses could potentially be punished by two to five years' imprisonment. Serious breaches of occupational safety and health provisions are also criminal offenses. Experts generally pointed to prevention of these offenses, rather than adequacy of the available punishment, as the main challenge to worker rights' protection in these areas. RosTrud, the agency that enforced these provisions, noted that state labor inspections were understaffed and inspectors needed additional professional training. The agency did not provide data on the number of inspectors or budgetary and other resources allocated to enforcement of wage, hour, and occupational safety and health laws. According to official statistics from RosTrud, inspectors found 499,200 labor law violations in the first 10 months of the year.

Although no official data were available, experts estimated the workforce in the informal or shadow economy was 25-30 percent and growing. The largest share of laborers in these sectors was concentrated in the trade, construction, and agricultural sectors, where workers were more vulnerable to exploitative working conditions. Labor migrants remained the group most vulnerable to mistreatment and were concentrated primarily in low-quality jobs in construction but also worked in housing, utilities, agriculture, and retail trade, often in the informal sector.

Although the FMS reported three to five million migrant workers in the country, experts believed that the number was between seven and 12 million, but even approximate numbers were difficult to verify. The FMS estimated that undocumented labor migrants among total labor migrants reached 57 percent in 2014. A November 2014 law changed the regulatory system for labor migration in the country for visa-free countries: Instead of quotas and work permits, employment licenses ("patents") for companies and individuals were introduced. The quota system was criticized as an ineffective and corruption-prone mechanism for regulating labor migration. According to the FMS, 1.6 million patents were issued during the first 10 months of the year.

On January 10, new rules came into effect that toughen punishments for foreigners who commit administrative violations. Under the rules authorities may prohibit persons who exceed their officially registered stay in the country for more than a year from entering the country for 10 years. The FMS estimated that more than three million persons may be subject to such bans.

Many migrants regularly faced discrimination and hazardous or exploitative working conditions. There was no national information available on the number of workplace accidents, fatalities, or deaths during the year.

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