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Russia

by Robert W. Ortung

Capital: Moscow
Population: 141.9 million
GNI/capita, PPP: US\$18,330

Source: The data above was provided by The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2011*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Electoral Process	4.50	4.75	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50
Independent Media	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Governance*	5.25	5.00	5.25	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.75	4.50	4.75	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75
Corruption	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50
Democracy Score	5.00	4.96	5.25	5.61	5.75	5.86	5.96	6.11	6.14	6.18

* Starting with the 2005 edition, Freedom House introduced separate analysis and ratings for national democratic governance and local democratic governance to provide readers with more detailed and nuanced analysis of these two important subjects.

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

Executive SUMMARY

As the Russian leadership continued its slide into political stagnation in 2010, a small but growing number of citizens showed signs of discontent. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin remains the most important player in the political system, though he makes decisions as part of a small leadership group that includes President Dmitry Medvedev and representatives of the security, law enforcement, military, and economic agencies. They have maintained centralized authoritarian control and rejected moves toward democratization. The current system runs tightly orchestrated elections, manages influential media, and ensures that the courts rule in the government's favor on politically sensitive cases. Since coming to power as president at the beginning of 2000, Putin has established a personalized system of authority in Russia that has weakened institutions such as the parliament and stunted the evolution of political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and free public discussion in the popular media. The economy remains heavily dependent on revenue from the extraction of natural resources, and the business elite's ability to survive is contingent on personal relations with the incumbent authorities.

In 2010, the federal executive strengthened its hold over the 83 regions, as Medvedev removed the few remaining governors with quasi-independent bases of support and replaced them with officials who were more likely to carry out Kremlin orders. Presidential appointees with no electoral experience now comprise a majority of Russia's governors. Demonstrations spread across the country, protesting state policies and the government's apparent sanctioning of violence against journalists and activists. However, movements dealing with specific issues have yet to merge into a coherent political opposition that can challenge the regime. Meanwhile, the rising price of oil gave the authorities more funds to distribute, helping them to ensure that nothing disturbs the status quo.

National Democratic Governance. Russia's political system is based on lawlessness, and there are no reliable mechanisms that the population can use to hold their leaders accountable. A key problem is the bloated bureaucracy, which regularly ignores orders from above and serves its own interests rather than those of the public. At the same time, the powers of the security services are expanding, and the leadership has not been able to adopt a coherent police reform. The executive branch as a whole dominates other government institutions, including the rubber-stamp legislature. A scandal in the spring of 2010 revealed that most members of the State Duma, the lower house of the parliament, do not even bother to participate in its largely meaningless votes. Though Russian citizens today enjoy many personal

freedoms, expansive executive power is chipping away at such rights as the ability to travel. *Russia's national democratic governance rating remains unchanged at 6.50.*

Electoral Process. Elections in Russia do not give citizens a chance to participate in decision-making processes. The ruling United Russia party is typically guaranteed victory, as the authorities sideline opposition candidates and exert pressure on voters. The ruling party won a string of regional and local elections in 2010. Many of Russia's cities have already eliminated mayoral elections in favor of city managers hired by the local councils, and the rest are under pressure to follow suit. *Russia's electoral process rating remains unchanged at 6.75.*

Civil Society. Russian civil society was increasingly active in 2010, though the state used a variety of measures to suppress it. Prominent rallies took place to oppose local authorities in Kaliningrad, to defend the Khimki forest outside Moscow from development, and to assert the constitutional right to freedom of assembly. In response, police raided many organizations, confiscating computers and important documents. A number of civic groups arose spontaneously to cope with widespread wildfires during the summer, but these and other campaigns failed to merge into national, multi-issue political movements. The rate of hate crimes continued a two-year decline, though support for nationalist organizations remained strong. *Due to civil society's persistent action on a number of issues despite government suppression, Russia's civil society rating improves from 5.75 to 5.50.*

Independent Media. The state continues to control the politically important broadcast media and key print publications, strictly limiting their content. Selective application of the law on extremism serves as a convenient way to encourage self-censorship by potentially critical publications. The savage beating of journalist Oleg Kashin in November 2010 sent a strong signal to all journalists about the dangers of offending powerful interests. The internet provided readers with a variety of political opinions, though the authorities took measures to ensure that online discussions did not lead to political action. At the regional level, there are no areas with free media environments, and the overall situation has grown worse since the 2004 replacement of gubernatorial elections with a system of presidential appointments. *Russia's independent media rating remains unchanged at 6.25.*

Local Democratic Governance. In September 2010, President Medvedev removed Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov, the controversial but powerful leader who had originally come to office through elections. Medvedev has now installed a new class of governors who will be loyal to the federal leadership rather than representing regional interest groups. Despite popular support for the return of gubernatorial elections, the government has expressed no interest in such a change. Federal efforts to reduce the level of violence in the North Caucasus have yet to bear fruit, and Chechnya remains under the personal authority of Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov. *Russia's local democratic governance declines from 5.75 to 6.00.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. Russian courts are subject to demands from the executive branch in politically important cases. Informal pressures ensure loyalty and push judges to make the desired decisions. In 2010, this process was demonstrated anew in the high-profile cases against opposition-minded former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, whose prison term, due to expire in 2011, was extended to 2017 after a deeply flawed trial on dubious new charges. A new law that bars pretrial detention for economic crimes does not seem to be functioning effectively. In a positive development, Russia finally ratified a Council of Europe protocol that will allow the European Court of Human Rights to streamline its work. *Due to the increasingly egregious manipulation of the legal system to suit executive branch interests, Russia's judicial framework and independence rating declines from 5.50 to 5.75.*

Corruption. President Medvedev announced a new strategy for fighting corruption in April 2010, but there was little to show for such efforts by year's end. All measures of corruption in Russia indicate that it remains a serious problem. Crackdowns on graft typically target low-level bribe givers, leaving public officials untouched. The authorities have actively blocked efforts to investigate police corruption that led to whistleblower and lawyer Sergei Magnitsky's death in custody in 2009. *Russia's rating for corruption remains unchanged at 6.50.*

Outlook for 2011. Russia will hold parliamentary elections in 2011 and a presidential election in 2012. After 11 years under Putin's leadership, the degraded political system cannot address the challenges facing the country. As the time grows near for Putin to decide whether he will return to the presidency, the ruling elite is likely to split between advocates of continuing the current model of selective repression and those who promote efforts to diversify and modernize Russia's economy. Such a split will create more opportunities for the heretofore inchoate forces of civil society to express themselves. This greater room for maneuver will be available to both prodemocracy groups and ultranationalists who advocate exclusionary policies.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50

The current Russian political system is based on lawlessness and a lack of transparency that allows the bureaucracy to behave as it pleases. This leaves the Russian population with no reliable way of holding its government accountable.

The leadership realizes that the existing governance model is both fueling and failing to address corrosive problems, but seems paralyzed by indecision. The State Council, a senior advisory body that includes all regional governors, held an unprecedented session in January 2010 that was devoted to political reform. But rather than endorsing fundamental changes, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stressed the need for a “healthy conservatism” and expressed his strong desire to avoid the “Ukrainization” of Russian politics, suggesting that any move toward democratization would lead to chaos. Likewise, President Dmitry Medvedev warned in September that “parliamentary democracy” would be a “catastrophe” for Russia.

Growing bureaucratic intransigence forms another obstacle to serious reform. Many officials simply do not follow orders from above. For example, key personnel in the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Ministry of Internal Affairs and half of the regional governors did not publish income declarations in 2010 despite Medvedev’s highly publicized efforts to fight corruption.¹ Similarly, the judicial system continues to jail people suspected of economic crimes despite a new law forbidding that practice. In one case, fraud suspect Vera Trifonova died in jail on April 30 after spending four months in pretrial detention.² In an April speech to the Federation Council, the upper house of the parliament, Prosecutor General Yury Chaika lambasted the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the traffic police, state corporations, and various industries for ignoring the law and padding their official reports.³ Casinos continue to operate despite the banning of gambling in most parts of Russia in the middle of 2009.⁴ In another sign of such problems, Putin had live webcams installed so he could personally ensure the reconstruction of villages destroyed in summer wildfires.⁵

The most powerful institution in the system, and the main pillar of Putin’s authority, is the FSB. It is also the least accountable of all state agencies. In 2010 there was a major debate over the FSB’s powers, and ultimately on July 29 Medvedev signed a bill that gave it a legal foundation to issue warnings to people or even detain them if they are suspected of preparing to commit crimes against Russia’s security.⁶ The suspects face fines or up to 15 days of detention. Some observers expressed concern that the law would be used against the political opposition, labor unions, and media outlets.

Medvedev is unlikely to alter the FSB's practices. During his first two years in office, he replaced 63 percent of the senior presidential staff and 40 percent of the regional governors, but just 5 percent of the leadership of security agencies, according to sociologist Olga Kryshтанovskaya.⁷ Efforts to reform the highly unpopular police have also run into trouble. Medvedev announced plans to conduct major reforms and even proposed cutting the force by 20 percent. However, he did not replace the minister of internal affairs and has left the police to define the details of the reform themselves.

Russians today enjoy many personal freedoms. They can read whatever they like, participate in wide-ranging internet discussions, travel, and start businesses. But there are limits to these freedoms, in that they must pay bribes and sometimes engage in self-censorship,⁸ and there are some signs that the authorities are moving to restrict such freedoms even further. For example, in his blog, Federation Council speaker Sergei Mironov, leader of the Just Russia party, has noted an increase in the number of people appealing to him with problems exiting and entering the country.⁹ The authorities apparently have a list of individuals, including critical professors, who are delayed and searched each time they cross the border. Such measures are clearly aimed at intimidating outspoken individuals with international connections.

Because power has been concentrated in the executive branch and its bureaucracy, other governmental institutions lack the authority to uphold their formal independence in practice. For example, the parliament does not initiate policy, but merely approves proposals by the president and prime minister. A clear indication of the legislature's meaninglessness emerged during a major scandal in the spring, when it was revealed that most members of the State Duma did not bother to attend sessions and had a small number of colleagues vote on their behalf.¹⁰ The judiciary's compliance with political directives was on display in the high-profile case against the opposition-minded former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky. As his eight-year prison term for fraud and tax evasion was set to end in 2011, the authorities filed new charges against him and launched a second trial, resulting in the late December announcement of a conviction and a new prison sentence that will last until 2017.¹¹ Shortly before the judge finalized his decision, Putin publicly described Khodorkovsky as a "thief" who belongs in jail, reinforcing executive intervention in the working of the courts.

In an illustration of the dangers of institutional inertia, the federal government has failed to develop a coherent strategy for dealing with one of its most significant problems—the ongoing violence in the North Caucasus. During 2010, a reported 754 people were killed and 956 were wounded in fighting in the area.¹² There were deadly suicide-bomber attacks on the Moscow subway on March 29 and in Dagestan on March 31, but Medvedev's response focused on handing more powers to the security forces rather than addressing the root causes of the unrest.

Electoral Process

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
4.50	4.75	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

Elections in Russia do not give citizens a chance to participate in the political process. They merely serve as ritualistic confirmations for those who already hold power.¹³ The authorities have not registered an opposition party since 2004, when a law requiring a prospective party to enlist 50,000 members across the country went into effect.¹⁴ Most elections include pressure on voters to support the authorities' preferred party or candidate, the use of state resources to ensure the desired outcome, and the denial of registration to unapproved parties and candidates. The key national television networks, from which most Russians obtain their information, are tightly controlled and favor regime-backed candidates. Direct ballot rigging takes place in many regions.

Russia's most recent presidential and parliamentary elections did not meet international standards. The presidential election, held in 2008, simply ratified Putin's choice of his own successor, Dmitry Medvedev. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was not given sufficient time or allowed enough personnel to monitor the vote. A similar situation prevailed during the State Duma elections in 2007. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for late 2011, and the next presidential election will take place in 2012.

In March and October 2010, Russia held a number of regional and local elections. Perceptions of fraud were so widespread during the October 2009 regional elections that the Communist Party, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), and Just Russia factions staged an unprecedented, though short-lived, walkout from the State Duma, putting the regime on notice that crude techniques for ensuring victory were unacceptable. In the March 2010 regional and local elections, the ruling United Russia party won a similar 68 percent of the seats contested, but took less than 50 percent of the vote in the proportional representation section of the ballot in four of the eight regional legislatures in question. The increasing use of proportional representation systems in regional and local legislative elections has the effect of reducing the number of political groups that can participate.

In some cases, the authorities' attempts to determine the vote outcome were no match for voters intent on signaling a protest. In the run-up to the Irkutsk mayoral election in March, United Russia-backed candidate Sergei Serebrennikov was falling behind his opponent, Anton Romanov, a United Russia member who was running without official endorsement. The city's electoral committee removed Romanov from the ballot 10 days before the vote, claiming that he had not collected enough valid signatures, but most voters shifted their support to Communist candidate Viktor Kondrashov, who won a surprising 63 percent, compared with Serebrennikov's 27 percent. Kondrashov joined United Russia on June 29, a typical move for opposition candidates who win regional elections.¹⁵ Balloting in several other cities had similar results.

The October 2010 regional and local elections were also marked by irregularities, but did not cause a scandal. United Russia won between 45 and 70 percent of the vote in each contest, averaging slightly more than in March, and Novosibirsk was the only place where it won less than 50 percent. Nevertheless, the party took just over 63 percent of the seats in the Novosibirsk regional legislature. Overall, United Russia captured 76 percent of the regional legislative seats at stake. Average turnout was 49 percent, according to the Central Electoral Committee.¹⁶ While 99 percent of United Russia candidates were registered, only 54 percent of the candidates for the liberal Yabloko party made it onto the ballot, demonstrating the authorities' bias against the opposition. In Samara, the only big city not controlled by United Russia, electoral authorities refused to register opposition candidates for the mayoral and city council elections. In Krasnodar, four Communists were denied registration for the city council elections, provoking another 31 to boycott the race.¹⁷ Opposition parties in several regions complained of efforts to bribe voters and poor access for election monitors.¹⁸

Until recently, most Russian municipalities elected their mayors directly. However, since the elimination of gubernatorial elections in 2004, many governors have been putting pressure on cities and villages to replace mayoral elections with the hiring of professional city managers by local councils. In the period preceding the 2010 local elections, United Russia pressured municipalities to end direct elections so as to limit opportunities for voters to express dissatisfaction with the ruling party. In 2010, cities including Barnaul, Chelyabinsk, Izhevsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Perm, Ulyanovsk, and Yekaterinburg abolished their mayoral elections. A handful of others resisted the trend, including Arkhangelsk, Surgut, and Ulan-Ude. Pyatigorsk restored direct elections after previously eliminating them. Mayoral elections are important in the dozens of regional centers and large cities across Russia where the local executive controls substantial budgetary funds that are independent of regional elites. Governors prefer to deal with appointed mayors who are more likely to follow orders than those with popular mandates. Mayors with limited revenues, whether elected or appointed, have little autonomy.

A new procedure for forming the Federation Council will come into effect on January 1, 2011. Currently, governors and regional legislatures in Russia's 83 regions each appoint one council member, for a total of 166. The presidential administration heavily influences these appointments. Under the new rules, only elected officials are eligible to be appointed to the chamber, a change that favors United Russia, whose members dominate such offices.

Many Russians would like to reverse the numerous electoral law reforms enacted in the last 10 years, which have strengthened incumbents' hold on power. For example, a plurality (36 percent) want to lower the current 7 percent vote threshold for parties to enter the State Duma to 5 percent or less. The Duma is elected purely on the basis of nationwide proportional representation, and four parties are now represented. United Russia holds 315 of the 450 seats, followed by the Communist Party with 57, the LDPR with 40, and Just Russia with 38. More than 40 percent of Russians would prefer to return to the previous electoral system, in which at least half of the Duma

members are elected through races in single-member constituencies. Two-thirds favor restoring the right to vote “against all” on the ballot.¹⁹

Civil Society

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50

Loosely organized, politically oriented citizens’ groups grew more active in 2010 despite strong pushback from the state. More people agree that criticism of the authorities is useful (79 percent in 2010, up from 66 percent in 2007), but more also express fear that such critics will face unpleasant consequences (45 percent, up from 29 percent), according to Levada Center data.²⁰

Russians mounted numerous protest actions in 2010. In January, some 10,000 Kaliningrad residents took to the streets to protest taxes, high unemployment, and low living standards. They called for the resignation of their local governor and Prime Minister Putin.²¹ In April, motorists protested against government officials’ widespread use of flashing lights on their vehicles to get around Moscow traffic. In a grassroots movement led by Yevgeniya Chirikova,²² protesters braved violent crackdowns to defend the Khimki forest on the outskirts of Moscow from an US\$8 billion road construction project. Medvedev personally intervened in that dispute on August 26 to halt the felling of trees, but Putin’s government effectively allowed construction to proceed in December. On the last day of each 31-day month, a movement called Strategy 31 held protests in Moscow’s Triumphal Square to assert their right to freedom of assembly under Article 31 of the constitution.²³ In response to this activity, Putin told the newspaper *Kommersant* in August that protesters at unsanctioned rallies would be beaten on the head with truncheons.²⁴

Despite the often vicious response from the authorities, examples of grassroots activism abounded.²⁵ In St. Petersburg, persistent citizen activism forced the authorities to move a proposed skyscraper to house the state-owned energy giant Gazprom from the historic city center to the outskirts. In Perm and some other cities, voters organized to protect their right to directly elect mayors. Prominent artists, such rock star Yury Shevchuk, spoke out in various ways against the state’s authoritarian policies. Meanwhile, the authorities have improved conditions for socially oriented NGOs that steer clear of political topics, for instance by offering grants through the Public Chamber advisory body. Such steps could eventually lay the groundwork for democratization, according to some observers.²⁶

Despite the increased energy among social groups, state pressure on them remained strong. Police raided many of the most prominent and active environmentalist and human rights–oriented NGOs. In January, officials in Irkutsk seized computers from the environmentalist group Baikal Wave, claiming that they were using pirated Microsoft software. The organization had criticized plans to reopen a complex of paper mills owned by billionaire businessman Oleg Deripaska, which threatened to pollute Lake Baikal.²⁷ The police dropped the software piracy

charges in December under international pressure, and after Microsoft announced that it would not support the case.²⁸ Microsoft also said it would issue software licenses to advocacy groups, other NGOs, and independent media outlets in an effort to prevent government crackdowns under the guise of software-piracy inquiries.²⁹ Separately, hackers attacked the Khimki protesters' website (Ecmo.ru) on August 31 after it posted critical material about the governor of the Moscow region, Boris Gromov.³⁰ The police repeatedly arrested participants in the Strategy 31 rallies, leading to a number of high-profile cases. That of Sergei Makhnatkin drew particular attention. He was sentenced on June 9 to two and a half years in prison for allegedly breaking a policeman's nose during a December 31, 2009, protest in Moscow, having intervened to help an elderly woman who was being brutally arrested. Makhnatkin was not taking part in the protests and was simply walking by when he saw the arrest taking place.

The greatest assault against civic groups came between September 13 and 16, when the prosecutor general's office carried out a series of searches in the offices of approximately 40 NGOs, including the Moscow Helsinki Group, Memorial, Golos, and Transparency International.³¹ The organizations argued that the searches violated legal procedures, and the authorities claimed that they were only seeking to determine if the NGOs were obeying the law. Many of the targeted groups receive funding from the United States or European Union countries. Such politically active groups have trouble raising money from Russian donors, who fear that supporting them would draw negative attention from the regime.

At the end of the year, Oleg Orlov, head of Memorial's human rights division, was standing trial for allegedly libeling Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov. He had been charged with criminal defamation on July 6 for publicly linking Kadyrov to the murder of human rights activist Natalya Estimirova in 2009. Orlov had already been forced to pay Kadyrov 70,000 rubles in damages from a related civil case that ended in January.

Some groups have formed to provide services not offered by the state. When extensive wildfires ravaged the country in the summer of 2010, burning 3,609 square miles, killing 54 people, and leaving 3,300 homeless, numerous organizations appeared spontaneously to provide aid. However, none of these groups have united into larger political movements that take on issues beyond their initial concern, nor have they built up national networks that connect many regions in a prominent way. They generally have trouble passing knowledge and experience to fellow activists in other groups. In Kaliningrad, the authorities managed to thwart the nationalization of the local protest movement by pressuring its leader, Konstantin Doroshok, to leave Solidarity, a nationwide opposition coalition.³² To some extent, the internet is providing a basis for national coordination. For example, a site on the blogging platform LiveJournal was established to unite the local firefighting groups.³³ However, these virtual links have not led volunteer and social-service organizations to take up unified political action.

On November 6, Medvedev issued a rare veto to block a bill that would have banned individuals convicted of minor administrative offenses (such as traffic

violations, or traveling on public transportation without a ticket) from joining rallies for a year.³⁴ However, since the presidential administration stage-managed both the adoption and the veto of the bill, it was likely an effort to help Medvedev burnish his liberal image.³⁵

The state is trying to exert greater control over Russia's weak independent labor unions. The government in 2010 encouraged free trade unions to unite under a new umbrella group, the Alliance of Russian Trade Unions, but key unions—including those representing dockworkers, coalminers, and metalworkers—did not join.³⁶ Such unions do not belong to the generally pro-regime Federation of Independent Trade Unions, which receives extensive support from the state and owns considerable amounts of property, giving it key advantages over smaller, nonstate unions.

While Russians are less likely to make charitable donations, they volunteer as much as people in other countries. Overall, 6 percent of the Russian population makes regular donations, 20 percent volunteer time, and 29 percent are willing to help a stranger in need.³⁷ Globally, one-third make regular donations to charity, and 20 percent volunteer time. Reasons for the low level of charitable giving in Russia include general poverty, aversion to the Soviet ideal of emphasizing social interests over individual concerns, fear that contributions will be misused by corrupt individuals, a lack of faith in nonprofit organizations, and the absence of tax benefits for contributions.³⁸

Women are underrepresented in public and corporate life. Three of 19 federal cabinet ministers are women, and the female governors of St. Petersburg and Khanty-Mansi are the main exceptions at the regional level. Only 9 percent of general directors in Russian companies are women, as are 4 percent of board chairpersons and 3 percent of company presidents, according to a survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers.³⁹

There is high but stable support for nationalist groups in the country, according to SOVA, an NGO that monitors them.⁴⁰ The number of hate crimes declined for the third year in 2010, with 37 murders, compared with 60 in 2009.⁴¹ However, in December 2010 ultranationalists gathered approximately 10,000 supporters for a demonstration in front of the Kremlin and in a nearby subway station, beating anyone who appeared non-Slavic. To some extent the authorities have encouraged these groups as a balance to prodemocracy groups and as a rationale for continued authoritarian rule, claiming that liberalization would allow extremists more influence.

Independent Media

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

The state maintains firm control over Russia's key television networks, which 89 percent of Russians consider to be their primary source of news.⁴² These channels convey the leadership's policies and frame important events for their audiences. For example, documentaries criticizing Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov's corrupt

practices were aired in the period leading up to his dismissal by the president in September 2010. During the summer wildfires, network broadcasts portrayed Putin and Medvedev as the principal leaders working to combat the blazes.

The main television networks also ignore information on topics the leadership wants to avoid. Media censorship limits public knowledge of the violent conflict in the North Caucasus, for example. The channels continued to air regular programming as a terrorist attack on the Moscow subway unfolded on the morning of March 29. They similarly failed to report on protesting miners in Mezhdurechensk as they blocked a railroad on May 14, after 90 of their colleagues were killed in a deadly explosion.⁴³ Television talk shows are edited before broadcast to eliminate sharp political criticism.⁴⁴ Journalist Leonid Parfyonov drew attention to such censorship in a speech delivered to television executives in November 2010; a recording of his remarks was widely viewed and discussed on the Russian internet.⁴⁵ He bluntly said that television did not provide news.

Though there is considerable diversity in the print and online media, the independent outlets that do exist survive only because the political leadership allows them to. Such outlets are under considerable pressure. The law on extremism has become “one of the worst problems journalists in Russia face.”⁴⁶ In April, the Federal Service for Supervision of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) issued a warning to the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* for allegedly propagating extremism after it published a critical article in January about the nationalist group *Russkiy Obraz*,⁴⁷ including information about its program and photographs of its members giving Nazi-style salutes. Editor Dmitry Muratov pointed out that the warning was absurd because the article itself warned about the dangers of such groups. Under Russian law, the authorities can close a publication after two such warnings. Although *Novaya Gazeta* challenged the warning in court in October, the final ruling was in favor of Roskomnadzor. In a separate case of official pressure, masked police raided the offices of the *New Times* in September in an effort to identify sources who had provided investigative journalist Ilya Barabanov with information for his article “Slaves of OMON,”⁴⁸ about the riot police.⁴⁹ A court had ordered the magazine to hand over the necessary material, but editor Yevgeniya Albats refused, claiming that doing so would endanger the sources and their families. Media professionals have also expressed concern that the newly passed FSB law, which allows the service to detain individuals over national security concerns, may be unfairly used against the media.

The murders of Russian journalists over the last 10 years remain unsolved, creating a climate of impunity for attacks on the media. The savage November 6 beating of *Kommersant* reporter Oleg Kashin, a video recording of which was disseminated on the internet,⁵⁰ reinforced the general sense of intimidation faced by journalists. Kashin had made numerous enemies through articles and online posts about the Khimki forest dispute and the two main pro-Kremlin youth groups financed by the United Russia party—Nashi and Molodaya Gvardiya. The Molodaya Gvardiya website had posted a warning that “Kashin will be punished” in the months before his beating. The attack spurred an unusually strong reaction from

Russia's journalists, who sought to work together to protect themselves.⁵¹ Kashin's beating was similar to a 2008 attack on Mikhail Beketov, editor of the newspaper *Khimskaya Pravda*, who had also opposed the Khimki forest construction. In September, police ended the investigation into the attack on Beketov, having made no arrests. The beating had left him partially paralyzed and unable to speak. On November 10, a court found Beketov guilty of slandering Khimki mayor Vladimir Strelchenko by accusing the official of ordering the burning of his car in 2007. On December 10, the court reversed the decision and said that Beketov had not committed a crime.

Given their reputation for providing only one point of view, the state-controlled broadcast media are slowly losing their authority and audience to the internet. Russia has 44 million users who go online at least once a month, and approximately 30 million active users. Most are located in the major cities, but internet use is growing in the regions as well.⁵² The country's roughly 11,000 core bloggers are more independent, internationally oriented, and opposition-oriented than general Russian internet users and those who rely on state-controlled television channels.⁵³ One insider estimates that the number of people who actively read political news on the Russian internet is about 40,000, with the same people reading many of the different sources.

The government uses a variety of subtle and sophisticated strategies to achieve its political goals online.⁵⁴ While authorities in some countries have been inclined to crudely obstruct internet access, the Kremlin recognizes that it can use information gleaned from the internet to disrupt, intimidate, and mislead potential opposition groups.⁵⁵ At the same time, it influences the information available to users by exerting legal pressure on website owners and editors, mounting denial-of-service attacks at times when independent websites are in great demand, or sponsoring large volumes of commentary to drown out the opposition's message on their own websites.⁵⁶ As with traditional media, the law on extremism is an important tool for restricting freedom of expression online. Website owners can be held responsible for extremist comments posted by their users, and Roskomnadzor has developed a system in which it informs internet-based media by e-mail if user comments violate the law. The owners have 24 hours to remove the offending material.⁵⁷ In some instances, particularly in the regions, the remedies imposed by the authorities are more draconian. On July 16, 2010, a Komsomolsk-on-Amur city court ordered the local internet provider Rosnet to block five sites, including YouTube, on the grounds that they presented extremist material.⁵⁸

In a possible sign that the authorities are not monolithically opposed to the existence of critical media, the Supreme Court on September 20 barred lower courts from issuing "ruinous" libel decisions that would bankrupt media outlets.⁵⁹ However, skeptics pointed out that the ruling failed to state a maximum amount for fines or damages in libel cases, which the court said was the responsibility of the legislature.⁶⁰

Conditions for journalists and independent media outlets are especially difficult at the regional level, and the situation is slowly getting worse, thanks

in part to the elimination of gubernatorial elections, according to the Glasnost Defense Foundation.⁶¹ The most restrictive areas are Leningrad and Moscow regions, the North Caucasus, Kalmykia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Zabaikalsk, and Khabarovsk territory. By contrast, there is much greater freedom in Karelia, St. Petersburg, Sverdlovsk region, Perm territory, the south of Western Siberia, and the Far East. The Alliance of Regional Media Managers in Russia complained that regional authorities in Voronezh interfere in the editorial policy of local newspapers, forcing them to devote considerable space to publishing official information.⁶² In Kaliningrad, the governor's press service sent an e-mail message to local editors, ordering them to run an interview with a respected person in their area to make the point that "we see how much has been accomplished in our district, life continues despite the crisis, of course there are problems, but it is unacceptable to rattle the region and raise political slogans."⁶³

Local Democratic Governance

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00

In 2010, the federal government dramatically changed its relationship with regional authorities. Although Putin, as president, had eliminated gubernatorial elections in 2004, he largely used his new power of appointment to keep the incumbent governors in place. However, President Medvedev has now replaced most of the governors who first came to office through elections (though usually not through free or fair elections) with handpicked appointees. The most visible change was the September 2010 firing of Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov, but during the year Medvedev also replaced such regional heavyweights as Tatarstan's Mintimer Shaimiyev and Bashkortostan's Murtaza Rakhimov, each of whom had been in office for nearly two decades and had achieved some independence from the federal government. By sweeping away these vestiges of local autonomy, the Kremlin made clear that the federal government would now make strategic decisions for the regions.

The federal leadership demonstrated some recognition of the need to address local concerns in its gubernatorial appointments. With the replacement of the unpopular Georgy Boos as governor of Kaliningrad in September, for example, Medvedev signaled that he wanted regional leaders who could implement central plans while also maintaining political stability in their regions. To succeed him, the Kremlin chose Nikolai Tsukanov, head of United Russia's Kaliningrad branch, who is a local rather than an outsider like Boos. However, the protests that had erupted in Kaliningrad earlier in the year were as much against Putin and the broader system as against Boos personally, and it is not clear that removing individual governors will be sufficient to improve the situation. One of the demonstrators' demands was the restoration of gubernatorial elections. Some 59 percent of the population nationwide share that goal, according to Levada Center polls.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the existing cadres of appointed governors are working to extend the “vertical of power” from the president to the smallest town. Governors in Altai and Murmansk fired mayors of key regional cities in 2010, taking advantage of a power they received under a 2009 law.⁶⁵

Most tax revenue collected at the local level is sent to Moscow, leaving only small amounts to be spent at the discretion of local authorities. The result is that city officials have little incentive to improve the business environment in their jurisdictions.⁶⁶

The ongoing violence in the North Caucasus remains one of the most difficult problems facing Russia’s leaders. Medvedev seemed to be working to address the economic roots of the unrest when he created a new North Caucasus Federal District on January 19 and appointed Aleksandr Khloponin, a successful businessman and Siberian governor, to lead it. The move suggested an understanding that the previous policy of violently cracking down on the insurgents was not working, and that the federal government should focus on reducing the area’s high unemployment rate. On June 22, Russia even accepted a resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that was critical of Kremlin policies in the North Caucasus. However, by the end of the year, the economic approach remained more a declaration of intent than reality. In practice, the authorities continued to use force as their main tool to pacify the area.

A latent civil war is under way in Chechnya, according to Caucasus expert Aleksey Malashenko.⁶⁷ Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov had been credited with reducing rebel violence through brutal suppression, but insurgents mounted a number of attacks in 2010, including against well-guarded symbolic targets. An assault on Kadyrov’s home village of Tsentoroy on August 29 killed more than a dozen people, and an attack on the republic’s parliament on October 19 killed three and injured 17.⁶⁸ The level of violence is also increasing in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. On September 8, a suicide bomber killed 18 people and injured at least 100 near a crowded market in Vladikavkaz, capital of the predominantly Christian republic of North Ossetia. The violence has even spilled over international borders. Austrian police in 2010 found evidence linking Kadyrov to the 2009 Vienna murder of Umar Israilov, a former Kadyrov bodyguard who accused the Chechen leader of torture and other crimes.⁶⁹

Kadyrov continues to rule Chechnya through coercion and personal whim. He pressures women to wear headscarves, and in 2010 he praised men who shot women with paintball pellets if they appeared in public without religious attire. He has supported Sharia (Islamic law), while also claiming support for Russian law, suggesting that he is seeking greater autonomy for the republic within the broader framework of Russia’s federal system.

Judicial Framework and Independence

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
4.75	4.50	4.75	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75

Russian courts lack independence from the executive branch in cases that are politically important. Political leaders can impose a variety of pressures on judges through court chairmen, who are appointed by the president. The chairmen assign sensitive cases to reliable judges and make decisions on important personnel issues, such as salary levels and housing benefits.⁷⁰ Rulings that go against the government's wishes are frequently reversed on appeal. If judges have too many decisions overturned, they can be disciplined and even fired, which is the prerogative of the court chairman. Russia's combination of broadly written laws, overregulation, and selective enforcement make the judicial system a useful political tool, as demonstrated in 2010 by the second conviction and sentencing of Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Manipulation of the courts can also serve business interests, allowing one group to gain advantage over others. Businessmen understand that it is easier to win court cases if one has friends in high places, and the security of property rights is becoming increasingly contingent on political connections.⁷¹

While most cases have no connection to politics, the court system is subject to the same informal influences that shape Russia's political system. Verbal commands from above may affect decisions, but often judges are well aware of what is expected from them. Their professional alliances and loyalties are reportedly established during the appointment process, which involves obtaining clearance from government agencies and specific executive officials.⁷²

Announced reforms of the judicial system have not produced positive change. Amendments to the criminal procedure code that took effect in April 2010 abolished pretrial detention for those charged with economic crimes. However, press reports indicate that such detentions continue, and even a special ruling by the Supreme Court had little effect on the practice.⁷³ Similarly, a law that came into force on May 4 was ostensibly designed to ensure fair and timely trials and the timely enforcement of court judgments. But experts have argued that the law was actually enacted for political purposes, to improve Russia's image abroad, and that it will not be effective in reducing the large number of cases appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.⁷⁴ The law does not provide mechanisms for payments of compensation to individuals who are denied a timely trial. Only ministries have a procedure for collecting such payments. Moreover, the law does not affect excessively lengthy pretrial detention.

Nevertheless, Russia has made some surprising progress in its relations with the European Court of Human Rights. After many years as the last holdout, Russia in February 2010 ratified Protocol 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights, paving the way for a reform that will allow the Strasbourg-based court to operate much more quickly. At the beginning of 2010, it had a backlog of more than 120,000 cases.

At the end of 2010, the Russian parliament was in the process of approving a set of reforms that will make the Constitutional Court even more subordinate to executive power. The bill, already approved by the State Duma, removes the age limit for the court chairman, meaning the reliable Valery Zorkin will be able to stay on through the 2012 presidential election. In addition, according to the proposed procedures, the Federation Council, on the recommendation of the president, can remove the chairman or his deputies if they are not performing their functions satisfactorily, though two-thirds of the court's judges must first vote for such a move. Under another provision of the bill, it will be possible to remove judges if they miss two court sessions. The reforms also reduce the speed with which the court can hear cases by eliminating the two chambers into which the court can currently divide, forcing all decisions to be heard by a plenary session of the 19 judges.⁷⁵

A separate reform signed by Medvedev on December 28 removed the Investigative Committee, which plays an important role in launching major cases, from the prosecutor general's office and made it a separate agency directly subordinate to the president. Responsibility for some cases remains with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, and the Federal Antinarcotics Committee for the time being. The head of the reconstituted Investigative Committee, Aleksandr Bastrykin, is known to have close ties to Putin. The purpose of the change is a subject of considerable debate, but one theory is that the agency will be used to keep regional elites in line before the 2012 presidential election.⁷⁶

While jury trials are now possible in all of the country's regions, they are actually being used in fewer cases. Juries now try approximately 0.05 percent of all criminal cases and have a 20 percent acquittal rate.⁷⁷ Russian courts in general reach acquittals in 2.4 percent of cases, according to Supreme Court chairman Vyacheslav Lebedev.⁷⁸ In some areas and for some crimes, acquittals are even more rare. A miniscule 0.06 percent of defendants on trial for theft were acquitted in 2009.⁷⁹

There were 847,300 inmates in Russian prisons and penal colonies as of July 1, according to the Federal Penitentiary Service. Russia has the world's second largest per capita prison population after the United States. More than 90 percent of inmates in Russian prisons suffer from diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis, or are infected with HIV, according to the prosecutor general's office.⁸⁰ There have been some reforms of the penitentiary system, and public councils now have the right to inspect conditions for inmates, but the lack of repercussions following an inquiry into the 2009 death of jailed lawyer and corruption whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky suggests that such inspections will have little practical impact.⁸¹

Corruption

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50

Rhetorically at least, President Medvedev has made fighting corruption a top priority; on April 14, he promulgated a new national strategy and plan for countering

corruption in 2010–11. But whether by design or due to ineffectiveness, this plan has accomplished nothing. The scope of the problem is huge. Estimates of the size of the gray economy vary from 20 percent of the country's economic output, according to Russia's Statistical Service, to as high as nearly 50 percent.⁸² The average bribe has risen to 30,500 rubles (US\$1,015), from 23,100 rubles (US\$770) in 2009, according to Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika.⁸³ On October 29, Medvedev complained that Russia had lost US\$33 billion to kickbacks on state tenders, an amount equal to one-tenth of total federal budget expenditures. Nearly 80 percent of Russians say that corruption is a major problem and that it is much worse than it was 10 years ago, according to the Levada Center's Denis Volkov. In November, the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) reported that Russia had carried out just over a third of the group's 26 recommendations.⁸⁴

Unfortunately, Medvedev's stated plans do not address the most fundamental problems with corruption in Russia. These include civil service appointments in exchange for bribes or on the basis of personal connections, business activities conducted by public officials, the influence of billionaire business magnates on state decisions, demands for informal payments from businesses, and widespread graft problems in the health and education spheres.⁸⁵ Fighting corruption in a systematically corrupted country like Russia is a political issue rather than simply a law enforcement problem, and that makes it particularly difficult, according to Yelena Panfilova, director of Transparency International (TI) in Russia.⁸⁶

Most of the people prosecuted on corruption charges have been bribe givers rather than bribe takers, suggesting that state officials remain above the law.⁸⁷ Moreover, the vast majority of prosecutions have been for small bribes of US\$300 or less. Rather than go after the most powerful players who reap the greatest rewards from graft, law enforcement agencies seem to penalize ordinary people who are caught up in the system. While the number of media reports about efforts to combat corruption has increased, the quantity of prosecutions remains mostly unchanged. In 2009, officials registered 23,518 cases, or 7.6 percent more than in 2007. Of these, 6,691 went to court, 903 people were sentenced to serve time in jail, 3,694 received conditional sentencing, and 1,926 were fined. Defendants go to jail in only one out of 25 cases, according to a study conducted by the Anti-Corruption Research Center of the Russian Legal Academy, under the Ministry of Justice.⁸⁸ Public officials are required to file income declarations, but they are not required to explain their expenditures, which might provide greater transparency as to their real wealth.

TI estimates that a third of Russian businesses have been targeted in police actions instigated by rivals as part of attempted corporate raids.⁸⁹ Since May 1, 2009, state oversight bodies have been required to gain the prosecutor's approval before they carry out small-business inspections. However, a report by the Economic Development Ministry found that fewer than 4 percent of inspections had such prior approval in the second half of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010. According to the ministry, as many as 50 percent of the checks could be illegal.⁹⁰

Allegations surrounding the 2009 death in custody of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky suggest extensive corruption among law enforcement officers. Hermitage Capital, Magnitsky's client, has posted online videos alleging that some of the police investigators connected to the case have spent lavishly on luxury goods despite their modest salaries.⁹¹ Several of the officers involved have been promoted since Magnitsky's death, indicating that the authorities have little interest in prosecuting those responsible.⁹²

In another case, the Russian authorities have not followed up on significant evidence of corruption. On April 27, Mercedes Benz's Russian affiliate pleaded guilty to violating the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and agreed to pay US\$27 million in fines for bribes made to Russian officials or their relatives through U.S. companies or bank accounts.⁹³ The U.S. court documents pointed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the city of Moscow as the recipients of the US\$4 million to US\$7 million in bribes.⁹⁴ However, the investigation in Russia has been moving slowly, if at all, and yielded no clear results by year's end.

The firing of Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov made it possible for his political opponents to expose the corrupt practices that took place in the city during his reign. He signed a quarter of his decrees in secret and did not publish them, a violation of the law, according to Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin. Many of these decrees dealt with construction tenders favoring the mayor's wife, billionaire developer Yelena Baturina.

■ AUTHOR: ROBERT W. ORTTUNG

Robert Orttung is assistant director of the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, and a visiting fellow at the Center for Security Studies of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich.

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