

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	755
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Nations in Transit 2023 – Russia
Udgivet:	24. Maj 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. november 2023

Russia

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CONSOLIDATED AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

/100

Democracy Percentage	1.79 /100
Democracy Score	1.11 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS

5 /100

Consolidated Authoritarian Regime

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest.

The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic. See the methodology.



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Score changes in 2023

- **Civil Society rating decreased from 1.75 to 1.25** due to the effective suppression of civil society groups leaving almost no space for civic activism in the country, as well as aggravated discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community and ethnic minorities.
- **Independent Media rating declined from 1.25 to 1.00** to reflect pervasive wartime censorship and the repression of independent media, bloggers, and journalists, which has resulted in independent media virtually no longer able to operate in country.
- **Local Democratic Governance rating decreased from 1.50 to 1.25** due to increasing centralization of power through the imposed state of emergency and military mobilization, which has also drained the financial resources of municipal governments.
- **Judicial Framework and Independence rating declined from 1.25 to 1.00** due to the courts' approval of the annexation of Ukrainian territories, the country's formal withdrawal from international judicial systems, the recruitment of prisoners for war activities, and the intensification of extra-legal detainments, torture, and inhumane prison conditions.
- **Corruption rating declined from 1.25 to 1.00** due to evidence of total state capture accumulated over the course of several years, confirmed in 2022 by the ongoing embezzlement of public funds and enrichment of political elites in the midst of wartime mobilization.

As a result, **Russia's Democracy Score declined from 1.32 to 1.11.**

Executive Summary

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a massive military offensive in Ukraine that led to tens of thousands of lives lost and millions of displaced persons. The war has altered political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes in Russia, Ukraine, and Europe for years to come. In Russia, the consolidation of authoritarian personalist rule, removal of institutional constraints, years of fraudulent elections, and sweeping propaganda have corrupted political decision-making, the quality of governance, and government cadres. Consequently, the political leadership as well as large segments of

the population have embraced an isolationist and militant vision. **1** The political survival of President Vladimir Putin and his ruling coalition has become a countrywide task no matter the economic and human cost.

The war in Ukraine has sped up the further suppression of Russian civil society, political freedoms, and freedom of speech. All were effectively extinct by the end of 2022, which makes Russia one of the most oppressive political regimes in the world. The non-systemic political opposition has either emigrated or remains under constant threat of criminal charges and extra-legal pressure. **2** The acknowledged leader of the Russian opposition, Alexei Navalny, was moved to a stricter penal colony in the Vladimir region in June and has been regularly tortured for minor infractions. **3**

Russian citizens have limited access to independent information due to the ban on politically independent media outlets, and active censorship is implemented by the government's media watchdog, Roskomnadzor. Numerous media outlets, experts, and bloggers have been included on the "foreign agents" registry. Alternative sources of information that cover Russian political developments as well as the war in Ukraine can only be accessed via VPN technologies. **4** Television programs translate aggressive propaganda in the form of news, political talk shows, and debates. After February 24, the Russian state has enforced wartime censorship and propagates patriotism and militarism depicting Russia as a state encircled by enemies: namely, NATO, "Nazis," and "fascists." **5**

The Russian state has weaponized propaganda via traditional media as well as the internet and social media by instilling a sense of existential insecurity and the necessity for national defense. According to observers, the Russian public has been primed to accept the new realities of war. **6** Constant exposure to propaganda has affected opinion polls regarding the public's endorsement of the war in Ukraine. This has spurred controversy over the level of truthful support for the war, and has served as additional grounds for imposing international sanctions. Kremlin spin doctors have proved effective in delegitimizing international reports on war crimes in Ukraine—particularly those in Bucha and Irpin, or the shelling of Mariupol—in the eyes of the Russian audience. **7** In terms of polarization, the antiwar and pro-regime publics and media continue to drift further apart. Massive propaganda on Russian television has primed viewers for further military actions and provides them with the appropriate interpretations. **8**

There is a clear divide between supporters of the war and the antiwar public. Yet, since opposition to the war is criminalized, real numbers remain unknown. The largest antiwar rallies took place in February but were brutally oppressed. ⁹ Prominent figures in the Russian cultural landscape have made open statements against the war, including singers, comedians, actors, musicians, and even some oligarchs. Right after the invasion, there were multiple petitions from various professional organizations demanding a stop to the bloodshed in Ukraine. At the same time, promilitary and patriotic organizing turned out to be more successful and more visible, including formations of people in the Z shape (a symbol of the Russian invasion), festivals, and public gatherings. ¹⁰ Over time, the antiwar protest repertoire in Russia has changed from mass rallies and single-person pickets to more clandestine and inventive forms, such as imitation graveyards, graffiti, images of the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag or its colors, markings on Russian currency, or performative art, with mobilizations by student, feminist, and LGBT+ activists, among others. ¹¹

Despite official statements that the Russian state treats all citizens equally regardless of ethnic background, soldiers with roots in poorer regions, such as Buryatia and Dagestan, are disproportionately represented among the Russian casualties in Ukraine. ¹² An overall trend towards preserving “traditional values” and discriminating against the LGBT+ community has become more prominent. Attacks on and derogatory rhetoric towards the LGBT+ community are presented by Russian authorities as acceptable and not a subject of public concern. And new legislation bans any pro-LGBT+ materials in Russian advertising, media, books, films, and theater productions. ¹³

Since February 24, the Russian economy has been subjected to an unprecedented level of international sanctions, including financial measures, restrictions on oil and gas revenues, and sanctions on companies and private individuals. Meanwhile, Russia’s ability to fund its war has been helped by high oil and gas prices internationally. The sanctions, however, are weakening Russia in other ways, primarily through blocking the country’s access to the high-tech components and dual-use goods its industries and infrastructure require. Sanctions have also caused a severe setback in Russia’s imports and attempts to engage in import-substitution policies. ¹⁴

During the year, Russian political leadership was fully focused on foreign policy and action on the battlefields in Ukraine. As part of the military offensive, the government has sought to annex the occupied Ukrainian territories and impose a new

administration, including school curriculums, patriotic education, and Russophone media. ¹⁵ The practices of political intimidation and oppression have expanded to the occupied territories, where local residents have suffered extra-judicial punishments, torture, killings, rape, and looting. ¹⁶ Ukrainian residents of the occupied territories have been forced to evacuate to Russian territory, where they are exposed to humiliating and illegal filtration procedures in special camps organized by Russian troops. ¹⁷ Many of these actions have been accompanied by intentional violence, separation of families, and inhumane treatment of refugees.

At-A-Glance

In Russia, national governance represents outright authoritarianism, dominated by widespread oppression and large-scale corruption among the top elites. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine has set the Russian regime on a further downward spiral, making it one of the most notorious personalist dictatorships in the world. Led by President Putin, the regime actively represses the opposition as well as any noncompliant population. Elections fall short of international standards for being free and fair. Civil society groups still exist but are forced to engage in pro-state tasks. Independent media are now extinct inside Russia, many leaving the country in order to survive. De facto local governance has declined even further during wartime following the de jure elimination of local autonomy in 2020. The war in Ukraine has also revealed an even larger scale of corruption and embezzlement of public funds. The Russian judiciary depends on the political discretion of state authorities and functions with only limited autonomy.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.

1.00
/7.00

- Russian democratic governance remains at its lowest point since the Kremlin launched a full-blown military offensive in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. ¹⁸ The war has already led to at least 200,000 military casualties on all sides. ¹⁹ Meanwhile, the hostilities have also increased the executive's control over the judicial and legislative branches. Lacking democratic character prior to the onset of the invasion, Russia's governance system has been reoriented towards

prioritizing military success over providing public goods and services and addressing domestic issues. The country's de facto martial law has effectively constrained any remainders of political pluralism, civil freedoms, and freedom of speech, and has prioritized international politics over domestic issues. **20**

Consequently, the country is unequivocally dominated by the executive and, to an increasing extent, the military. In this regard, the military and security services operate without democratic oversight and implement decisions made by the executive—more precisely, by President Vladimir Putin and his inner circle. **21**

- The State Duma, elected in the fall of 2021, does not offer leadership, nor does it reflect societal preferences by providing a forum for the peaceful and democratic resolution of differences. The constitutional majority is maintained by the ruling United Russia, which ensures a smooth legislative process to provide legal grounds for government initiatives. For instance, the State Duma endorsed the annexation of the four occupied Ukrainian regions. **22** On October 19, 2022, President Putin imposed martial law through a series of executive orders that established restrictive (so-called high alert) legal regimes in the frontline regions as well as looser versions of a state of emergency (medium response level) in eight other regions. **23** Martial law regimes allow the governors to control entry and exit from their regions, and to evacuate people from areas deemed dangerous. The executive orders also allow for the introduction of certain elements of martial law in areas where it has not been officially imposed. Martial law allows authorities to confiscate vehicles and housing, close borders, wiretap phones, and order private businesses to devote their operations to military needs.
- On September 20, the State Duma adopted amendments to include the concepts of military mobilization, martial law, and wartime in the criminal code, and the introduction of several articles related to military operations: voluntary surrender (Article 352.1) involves up to 10 years in prison; looting (Article 356.1), up to 15 years; and punishment for unauthorized abandonment of a military unit during the period of mobilization and martial law is increased to 10 years in prison. **24** In addition to the contractual army and conscripts, Russia has actively deployed prisoners via the private military company Wagner. **25** On November 5, Putin signed a decree that allows people convicted of serious crimes to be mobilized into the Russian army. **26**
- At least 700,000 Russian citizens who openly oppose the war in Ukraine have fled the country—the biggest exodus from Russia since the collapse of the

Soviet Union. ²⁷ Among these émigrés are leading experts in IT and other industries, and representatives of the noncommercial, science, and education sectors. This outflow of highly qualified labor has led to significant loss of human capital and knowledge, and will alter the Russian political landscape. ²⁸

- President Putin announced a “partial military mobilization” on September 24, mentioning that only 300,000 reservists would be drafted. ²⁹ Governors and military commissariats were put in charge of implementing the mobilization following parameters adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. ³⁰ The real number of draftees remains unknown since mobilization continues at a slower pace in the Russian regions, where procedural violations, mistakes, and pressure have been observed. ³¹ On November 1, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that a decree was not required to end the mobilization. This could allow for “hundreds of thousands” of people to be mobilized in addition to the initial quota of 300,000. ³²
- Putin remains the ultimate decision maker on the war, while the government is in charge of sustaining operation of the economic sector, social security, and finance. The major task of the existing government is to amortize the negative effects of international sanctions, the declining purchasing capacity of the population, and the growing economic unpredictability overall in Russia.
- The war in Ukraine has unleashed further repressions on the political opposition. The country’s chief regime opponent and prisoner of conscience, Alexei Navalny, continues to be tortured in jail, while such prominent opposition figures as Ilya Yashin, Evgeniy Roizman, and Vladimir Kara-Murza face criminal charges of “false information” and “extremism.” ³³

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

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

1.25
/7.00

- In 2022, no major federal elections took place in Russia. However, there were 6 regional legislative bids, 14 gubernatorial elections, and 4,700 electoral campaigns in 82 regions, including the Moscow municipal elections. ³⁴ Eight regions implemented electronic distance voting that is known to favor United Russia candidates and is inaccessible to election monitors. ³⁵ The elections resulted in large-scale victories for United Russia-backed candidates at all levels,

without any unexpected breakthroughs by the opposition. **36** These elections did not qualify as free and fair according to the domestic monitor Golos. Electoral integrity falls short of international and Russian legal norms, and Russian voters are stripped of fundamental rights and freedoms. A continuing crackdown on freedom of speech prevents voters from exercising their electoral rights. Excessive, unconstitutional constraints on active and passive electoral franchise narrowed the scope of independent candidates as well as choices on the ballot. The overall alienation of voters manifests in lower turnout and decreased interest in elections. **37**

- As of July 21, 2022, federal law permitted the use of three-day voting and was immediately implemented in 26 out of 82 regions that voted in September. Russian domestic watchdogs described this move as a preelectoral manipulation that consistently biased results in the incumbents' favor. **38**
- Municipal elections in Russia provide more opportunities for systemic opposition to acquire political representation. Yet such opportunities have dramatically decreased due to wartime censorship, growing oppression, and procedural manipulations. Among the city councils to be elected, some expressed stronger protest sentiments than previously, including Gorno-Altai, Barnaul, Vladivostok, Kirov, Omsk, Tver, and Yaroslavl. A sharp increase in protest sentiment in 2022 was also registered in Barnaul, Omsk, and Yaroslavl. **39**
- The elections were marred with preelectoral manipulations as well as procedural violations on polling days. The last-minute amendments to the federal legislation provided additional advantage to loyal candidates and parties. The share of mandates distributed via party lists decreased, leading to more severe disproportionality in the electoral outcomes. Wartime censorship allowed the Russian authorities to exclude regime opponents from the elections. Voting at home and electronic voting remain highly problematic and gave additional electoral boosts to incumbents. **40**
- In late September, Russian-installed officials in Ukraine staged referendums on Russia's annexation of the occupied Ukrainian territories. Only North Korea officially recognized the results. **41** The voting took place in four areas: the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, Kherson Oblast, and Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Due to the ongoing military activities and martial law, no independent monitors were present; yet there are no legal grounds to consider either the conduct of the referendums or their results as legitimate. **42** Nevertheless, these sham votes served as the basis for the annexation of

Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts on September 30. Russia does not fully control these occupied territories and lost significant portions during Ukraine's counteroffensive in the fall.

- In terms of procedural integrity, referendum voters in Ukraine were coerced into voting, with armed soldiers going door to door to collect ballots. The soldiers, rather than the voters themselves, filled out the ballots. Individuals were not allowed to vote, as there was only one vote allowed per household. **43**

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

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

1.25
/7.00

- Russian civil society suffers under state pressure and a lack of varied sources of funding. The lion's share of state support, such as the Presidential Grants program, comes with strings attached. In 2022, the program sponsored many projects aimed at supporting initiatives in the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine, support for Russian citizens abroad, social security projects, and patriotic education. **44** During the year, at least 889 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) received presidential grants out of 11,203 proposals.
- Foreign funding for civil society organizations is prohibited. Amendments to the law on "foreign agents" as of June 29 allow authorities to so label those individuals and organizations who receive unspecified "influence or pressure" from foreign actors, and not necessarily of a monetary nature. Furthermore, relatives may be labeled a "person affiliated with a foreign agent." **45 46**
- In October, new legislation was passed that bans pro-LGBT+ materials in Russian advertising, media, books, films, and theater productions. This further tightens the already restrictive legislation that dates back to the 2013 "propaganda" law. **47** Russian authorities do not record statistics on violence against LGBT+ persons, nor do they prioritize training police or other institutions and public servants on the issue. Russian media portray LGBT+ persons in a degrading manner and mock trends on tolerance, while political leaders and authorities express solidarity with such mockery. According to statistics of the NGO Russian LGBT Network, the hate crime rate against LGBT+ persons has remained the same since 2014 (16–20 percent). But only 40 percent of victims approach the

police, whereas half of reports are rejected instantly or during preliminary investigations. **48**

- Citizens' freedom to gather peacefully in Russia is compromised and regularly violated by state authorities. As of this report, some 19,347 persons had been detained by the police since the invasion of Ukraine at public rallies against the war and the military mobilization. The largest protests on February 24–25 were brutally put down. **49** The police largely rely on artificial intelligence and face recognition systems to profile and prevent protests. Authorities have also conducted “preventive activities” on public holidays, and on the ratification of the referendums held in the occupied territories. **50** Police in the Moscow Metro stopped 141 activists on Victory Day, Independence Day, August 22, and September 30 using a face recognition system. Russian legislators proposed 29 amendments during the year to constrain peaceful assemblies. **51** At least 30 criminal cases are pending as a result of the anti-mobilization protests in Dagestan based on alleged violence against police officers. **52** Mediazona, a human rights watchdog, had registered 4,777 administrative cases as of October 24 based on charges of “spreading false information” (19 percent), noncompliance with police orders, violating statutes on mass rallies, and “incitement of hate.”
- The list of extremist organizations now extends to include the human rights NGO Vesna; **53** Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram; and Twitter. The social media platforms were accused of reinforcing Russophobia. **54** During the year, 12 new entries were added to the list of undesirable organizations, including Chatham House (UK), Macdonald-Laurier Institute (Canada), Ukrainian Canadian Congress (Canada), Heinrich Böll Foundation (Germany), Bellingcat (Netherlands), and the online media outlet The Insider. **55** Russia's Justice Ministry maintains a registry of nearly 200 “foreign agent” individuals and organizations who authorities claim have received foreign funding and engaged in political activities. **56**

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

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

1.00
/7.00

- The war in Ukraine has inflicted a major blow to Russia's already feeble media landscape, which is congested with state-sponsored propaganda and faux journalism. On March 2, 2022, the State Duma passed a law criminalizing "false information" about the armed forces, carrying a sentence of up to 15 years in prison. Besides the sharing of "false information," the law also makes it a crime to "discredit" Russia's use of the military in Ukraine, calling on other countries to impose sanctions on Russia, or protesting Russia's invasion of Ukraine, all of which are now punishable by fines and imprisonment. ⁵⁷ There are already more than 5,518 cases of "discrediting the Russian army" (Article 20.3.3. of the administrative code), and at least 384 individuals have faced criminal charges based on these war-related legal clauses. ⁵⁸ ⁵⁹
- In Russia, authorities have detained and harassed journalists for reporting on human rights violations, repressions, and the war in Ukraine. Several prominent independent media outlets have been shut down since the beginning of the war, including *Novaya Gazeta* (whose editor-in-chief, Dmitry Muratov, won the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize), Dozhd TV (TV Rain), Ekho Moskv (Echo of Moscow) radio, and Znak, an online news outlet. ⁶⁰ Ivan Safronov, a Russian journalist covering defense issues, was sentenced to 22 years in prison on charges of treason. ⁶¹ Journalists have lost their lives reporting on the war from the battlefield, like Oksana Baulina who was killed by shelling in Kyiv while reporting for The Insider. ⁶²
- At the same time, the country's massive antiwar exodus has led to the relocation of Russian media elsewhere, for instance, to Prague (The Insider, Radio Liberty, Current Time); Tbilisi (Mediazona, The Village, The Bell); Riga (Meduza, BBC Russia, Kholod); and Vilnius (Mediazona, Mikhail Khodorkovsky's projects). ⁶³ At least 504 journalists left Russia during the year, most of them after the outbreak of the war on February 24. ⁶⁴ Access to exiled media is mainly possible through VPN technology since most of these outlets were blocked by the Russian media watchdog Roskomnadzor. From February to December 2022, Roskomnadzor blocked at least 247,000 internet resources. ⁶⁵
- Despite the crisis in 2022, Russian independent media were largely successful in reconfiguring abroad and continuing to broadcast for audiences inside Russia. There is substantial growth in the number of political YouTube and Telegram channels; the Telegram audience has doubled from 2.5 to 4.7 million subscribers. ⁶⁶

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

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

1.25
/7.00

- Russian municipalities enjoy very limited political autonomy. On December 21, 2021, a Federal Law on Public Power came into force that legalizes the subordination of municipal power to state power in accordance with a 2020 constitutional vote. ⁶⁷ This statute signifies the end of Russian local self-governance, incorporating it into the state administrative vertical. The war in Ukraine effectively sped up this elimination of autonomy and has even revealed drastic inequalities in the extent of autonomy among Russian regions and municipalities.
- The military draft revealed striking inequalities between Russians and representatives of ethnic republics serving in the war. The wartime death toll is disproportionately spread across such Russian regions as Krasnodar, Buryatia, Dagestan, Sverdlovskaya oblast, and Bashkortostan. ⁶⁸ Representatives of ethnic minority groups claimed that the central government systematically discriminates against certain territories and non-Russian groups, and the war has made ethnic and regional hierarchies more visible. ⁶⁹ Local autonomy is curbed by the federal government in an effort to further centralize its power. There are debates in the State Duma around legislative proposals by United Russia deputies on whether to liquidate lower-tier municipalities (villages and towns), and whether governors can directly dismiss mayors for noncompliance or peer performance. These proposals are discussed under the guise of financial and administrative “optimization.” ⁷⁰
- Civic participation in local government in Russia has declined during the war. The 2022 Moscow municipal elections had 1,417 mandates at stake. Meanwhile, the opposition has ceased to be represented in any meaningful numbers. Only three candidates from Yabloko won races, while loyal candidates lost their council races in only 1 out of 125 districts. ⁷¹ Although municipal council posts are relatively powerless, candidates for mayor of Moscow are required to obtain support from council members to stand in elections. In this sense, municipal council members may enjoy limited bargaining power. At the same time, council members often become subject to political pressure. Alexei Gorinov, a Moscow

council member, was sentenced to seven years for “spreading fake news” (Article 207.3, Part II, of the penal code) about the war in Ukraine, **72** while another council member, Elena Kotenochkina, was forced to leave the country.

73

- On September 13, the St. Petersburg court ruled to permit the governor to disband the municipal council of Smolninskoye. The ruling was made when council members in the opposition started an impeachment procedure against President Putin on grounds of treason for launching the war in Ukraine. **74**

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

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

1.00
/ 7.00

- The Russian judiciary remains dependent upon the executive branch and the security services, especially regarding politically resonant cases. The country’s constitutional legislation provides little if no de facto protections for fundamental political, civil, and human rights.
- The justice system largely legitimizes and justifies decisions made by the executive. In 2022, Constitutional Court rulings recognized as lawful the treaties signed by President Putin to annex four Russia-occupied regions of Ukraine. **75** The Russian military, however, has failed to exercise full control over those territories. **76** In the context of Russia’s “partial military mobilization,” no legal or practical provision exists for alternative civilian service (ACS). In November, a new legal amendment effectively “abolishes ACS as a peaceful alternative to military service.” **77**
- On March 15, Russia formally announced its withdrawal from the Council of Europe, seeking to preempt a vote on expulsion; its membership was due to terminate on December 31, 2022. **78** The Russia-backed or occupied territories of Donetsk lifted the moratorium on the death penalty and sentenced to death four foreign military troops for “mercenary activities,” although they are subject to the Geneva Conventions as prisoners of war. **79** This move prompted speculation that Russia may be on the verge of restoring capital punishment, lifting a moratorium that has been in place since 1996. **80**

- Russia ceased to be party to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as of September 16, 2022, ⁸¹ meaning the country is no longer bound by ECtHR rulings. Amnesty International called this decision “a tragedy for victims of the Kremlin’s abuses.” ⁸² As of June 30, there were 17,550 pending applications to the ECtHR from Russia. Although the vast majority of cases are likely repetitive or inadmissible, there are some complex and high-profile cases, including over a dozen interstate applications. ⁸³ The ECtHR dealt with 6,002 applications concerning Russia in 2021, of which 5,261 were declared inadmissible or struck out by the court. It delivered 232 judgments (concerning 741 applications), 219 of which found at least one violation of the ECHR. ⁸⁴
- Prison conditions in Russia fall short of international standards for treating the incarcerated with dignity and respecting their rights. Prison authorities regularly resort to cruel methods and outright torture, while cutting off opportunities to communicate with the outside world. The case of U.S. basketball player Brittney Griner, who was sentenced to nine years in prison for drug smuggling, put a spotlight on the grim conditions and lack of transparency in the prosecution process. ⁸⁵ According to disturbing reports, opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been subjected to torturous conditions in a strict penal colony in the Vladimir region, ⁸⁶ where he has been detained in a solitary punishment cell (*shtrafnoy izolyator*, or *SHIZO*) four times in a row for alleged minor violations of internal order. The prison administration labeled him a “malicious violator” and has restricted the number of family visits to four per year instead of six. Navalny has been stripped of his right to have confidential communications with his lawyer, and communication with fellow prisoners is also restricted. ⁸⁷
- Russian police are notorious for under-reporting cases and artificially downplaying the number of complaints as well as resorting to illegal methods of obtaining evidence. There is abundant evidence of police torturing antiwar activists. One of the most viral cases was the torture of poet Artyom Kamardin and his colleagues who participated in a poetry reading on September 25 in Moscow against the war in Ukraine and openly expressed their antiwar stance. Police arrested five people, raided Kamardin’s apartment, brutally beat three people found there, and tortured Kamardin and his girlfriend. ⁸⁸
- According to OVD-Info, 16,436 individuals were detained at antiwar rallies after February 24. Many detainees have experienced a variety of extra-legal punishments. ⁸⁹ Employers have been pressured to fire workers who openly express their antiwar views, and many have been forced to quit their jobs. ⁹⁰

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

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

1.00
/7.00

- The war in Ukraine has revealed the extent of corruption and overall sorry state of Russian military structures. Alexei Navalny's investigative team exposed senior defense officials' expensive properties and hidden bank accounts, including a 2015 investigation into a luxurious mansion allegedly owned by Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu. ⁹¹ Embezzlement occurs across all ranks of the army and has exposed its lack of supplies and poor logistics. Over the last eight years, military courts have revealed more than 12,000 corruption cases involving the theft of military gear and equipment, with some cases occurring even after Russia invaded Ukraine. ⁹²
- The Russian government, despite existing anticorruption legislation, remains highly tolerant towards corruption. This legislation (on embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, kickbacks, and so forth) is often instrumentalized as a tool of political pressure in intra-elite struggles. In 2022, there were a number of loud criminal accusations against prominent heads of universities. On June 13, Vladimir Mau, rector of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public administration (RANEPA), faced criminal charges for committing large-scale fraud. ⁹³ This case was part of a repression campaign against the technocratic faction of the Russian elite that began in 2021. The head of the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (aka Shaninka), Sergei Zuev, and former deputy education minister Marina Rakova, also affiliated with Shaninka, were arrested in 2021 and were still under investigation in 2022. ⁹⁴
- Non-state whistleblowers, such as former entities affiliated with the Anti-Corruption Foundation, continue to raise high-profile investigations among Russian elites. The most viral investigation, in collaboration with Proekt Media, focuses on Alexey Miller, CEO of Gazprom, the world's largest public energy supplier. Miller is accused of "embezzling billions" from Gazprom to enrich himself as well as the "friends and relatives of Putin." ⁹⁵
- Other investigations focus on Putin's yacht, *Scheherazade*, worth \$700 million; ⁹⁶ hidden assets of Putin's ex-wife, Lyudmila Putina; ⁹⁷ and the war-related business of the general in charge of Putin's "special military operation" in

Ukraine, Sergei Surovikin. ⁹⁸ Allegations of corruption are given wide and extensive airing by independent media and internet outlets that, however, are mostly located outside Russia and cannot be accessed without VPN technology. The public media largely ignore evidence provided by independent investigations, especially ones affiliated with Navalny and his allies, because these connections may potentially jeopardize them for covering or even collaborating with “extremist organizations.”

- The partial military mobilization has provoked petty corruption in the form of exclusions from the registry of draftees and cash grabs at border crossings (such as Verkhniy Lars, a checkpoint between Russia and Georgia). ⁹⁹ Obtaining official exemptions from the military draft has incentivized businesses and individuals to engage in petty corruption across Russia.
- The Russian economy remains overly regulated by state authorities, and the war in Ukraine has opened up new ways to exert pressure on the private sector. For example, conscription centers (commissariats) have requested reports and lists of employees that are potentially eligible for the military draft. ¹⁰⁰
- Whistleblowers, anticorruption activists, investigators, and journalists enjoy no legal protections that would make them feel secure about reporting cases of bribery and corruption. Investigative journalism as well as anticorruption activism face extreme pressure and violence perpetrated on behalf of state authorities. ¹⁰¹
- Russia scored 29 out of 100 on Transparency International’s 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, marking Russia as one of the most kleptocratic states in the world. ¹⁰² In fact, Ilya Shumanov, head of TI Russia, made an official statement about such ongoing pressure and threats in the country. ¹⁰³

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Footnotes

- ¹ Lucian Kim, “Russia Isolated in Its Postimperial Phantasm”, The Russia File. A Blog of the Kennan Institute. 11 May 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/russia-isolated-its-postimperial...>
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escalates

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