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Russia

by Robert W. Ortung

Capital: Moscow
Population: 143.5 million
GNI/capita, PPP: US\$22,800

Source: The data above are drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2014*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Electoral Process	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75
Independent Media	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
National Democratic Governance	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Local Democratic Governance	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00
Corruption	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75
Democracy Score	5.61	5.75	5.86	5.96	6.11	6.14	6.18	6.18	6.21	6.29

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

Although the large street protests of 2011 and 2012 were not repeated in 2013, considerable discontent permeated Russian society as President Vladimir Putin's authoritarian regime moved well into its second decade. In its efforts to maintain control, the Kremlin continued to manipulate elections, unleashed the law enforcement agencies on civil society, maintained a firm grip on the crucial television broadcasters while stepping up harassment of independent online critics, and sought to further reduce the independence of the judiciary. However, it did little to combat the country's extensive corruption, which appeared to increase amid preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Putin's decision at the end of the year to release prominent political prisoners—including former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, two members of the protest group Pussy Riot, and 30 Greenpeace activists—highlighted the concentration of power at the top rather than demonstrating any fundamental change in the system.

The most visible weapon in the Kremlin's campaign to intimidate and neutralize the opposition was the Investigative Committee, a powerful law enforcement body. Threats of legal action, criminal investigations, charges of serving foreign powers, show trials, and prison terms dominated the Russian political discourse. At the same time, the leadership attempted to distract attention from these crackdowns by focusing its propaganda machine on the upcoming Olympics and other sporting events hosted in Russia.

Putin also sought to turn society against itself by facilitating attacks on the most vulnerable parts of the population. A new federal law against "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations," which received backing from the Russian Orthodox Church, and a focus on migrant workers as a source of crime and unemployment afflicting ethnic Russians helped stir populist feelings that Russia's rulers hoped to exploit for their benefit.

National Democratic Governance. As he continued to concentrate power, undermine the country's political institutions, and remove potential sources of opposition, Putin gave much greater authority to the security and law enforcement agencies. These groups effectively competed among themselves to repress opposition-minded members of society. Putin no longer attempts to appeal to all Russians, instead seeking support for his regime from relatively poor and less educated rural residents at the expense of the more educated and wealthier urban population. Because the leadership continued to rule through repressive mechanisms, *Russia's rating for national democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.50.*

Electoral Process. The regional elections on 8 September were deeply flawed, allowing the ruling United Russia party to dominate. Anticorruption blogger and leading opposition figure Aleksey Navalny's campaign for mayor of Moscow won more votes than expected on a tilted playing field, suggesting that free elections would have given the opposition more representation. Throughout the year, the Kremlin continued discussions on how to change the federal electoral law to maintain the political status quo while also revising regional electoral laws to improve official results for the regime. Given the tightly controlled regional elections and further efforts to manipulate the electoral law in the government's favor, *Russia's rating for electoral process remains unchanged at 6.75.*

Civil Society. Acting under a 2012 law that requires nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that receive foreign funding and engage in vaguely defined "political activities" to register as "foreign agents," the authorities in February carried out inspections of about 1,000 organizations, with the apparent purpose of intimidating them and disrupting their work. The election-monitoring group Golos suffered the worst repercussions, as the Justice Ministry subsequently dissolved it. Its director fled the country, and although members were able to regroup, the organization operated at a reduced capacity. Other activists and government critics also sought refuge abroad, and the government seemed to encourage the trend. At the same time, the Kremlin has sought to harness extreme nationalist groups for its purposes, promoting xenophobia and loyalty to the state. Due to the regime's increased harassment of independent organizations and its efforts to remove the most articulate members of the opposition from active public life, *Russia's rating for civil society declines from 5.50 to 5.75.*

Independent Media. The Kremlin in 2013 retained its extensive control over Russian television and increased its ability to influence and interrupt online discussion, exerting pressure on the internet-based television broadcaster Dozhd (Rain). Journalist Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev was shot dead in Dagestan in July, and many other editors came under pressure, with several losing their positions. A new law ostensibly aimed at internet piracy gave the state the ability to close websites without a court order if they are suspected of using copyrighted materials illegally. Given the lack of improvements in the repressive media environment, *Russia's rating for independent media remains unchanged at 6.25.*

Local Democratic Governance. Municipal governments remained subservient to federal and regional authorities, suffering from a lack of guaranteed or autonomous funding to handle their extensive responsibilities. A number of mayors were arrested after coming into conflict with regional or federal superiors, including the United Russia critic Yevgeniy Urlashov of Yaroslavl. Although opposition candidate Yevgeniy Royzman won the mayoralty of Yekaterinburg in September, the unelected city manager holds most executive power. *Russia's rating for local democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.00.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. The Kremlin continued to use Russia's courts to suppress political opposition in 2013, with a series of legal actions against Navalny being the most prominent example. Putin also introduced a measure that would fold the arbitration courts into the courts of general jurisdiction, effectively weakening the most professional and independent branch of Russia's court system. *Russia's rating for judicial framework and independence remains unchanged at 6.00.*

Corruption. Putin and his agents have selectively pursued corruption charges to discipline wayward elites and defuse potential opposition in society. State efforts to review the income and regulate the foreign property holdings of officials have had few practical results. Despite obstacles and punishments imposed by the authorities, independent activism by Navalny and others has been much more effective at exposing high-level abuses. As the Sochi Olympics approached, civil society began to report evidence of massive corruption that had inflated the unprecedented \$50 billion cost of the games. Although the administration created a new office for countering corruption at the end of the year, few observers expected it to improve the situation. Due to the continued weakness of official antigraft mechanisms, the suppression of independent investigations, and signs of growing malfeasance, *Russia's rating for corruption declines from 6.50 to 6.75.*

Outlook for 2014. The world's attention will focus on the Winter Olympics in February, raising questions about the country's treatment of its LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) population and migrant workers, but also highlighting Russia's authoritarian political system, slowing economy, rampant corruption, and persistent terrorism. The Moscow city council elections in September are likely to be a catalyst for opposition activity as Putin's critics seek to gain a platform in the capital, and the Kremlin can be expected to take measures to limit their influence. Fourteen regions will elect governors, and a number will also hold legislative elections. The shifting balance between single-mandate districts and proportional representation will draw scrutiny in the regional voting as the Kremlin looks for guidance in its effort to rewrite the federal electoral law to ensure victory in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Running parallel to domestic developments will be the evolving political crisis in Ukraine, with events there presenting a potential alternative to continued authoritarian rule in Russia.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

President Vladimir Putin has ruled Russia since 2000, using increasingly authoritarian means to retain power. The Kremlin works relentlessly to undermine any potential opponent or alternative center of power before it has a chance to challenge the status quo. The regime established by Putin generally seeks to co-opt or intimidate rather than eliminate its opposition, neutralizing the most effective rivals while sending strong signals to the rest of society not to get involved in the political process.

One important dissident, former oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was released on 20 December after 10 years in prison thanks to a presidential pardon. He immediately flew to Germany and announced that he would not participate in Russian politics beyond helping to free political prisoners who remained behind bars at the end of the year, including Platon Lebedev and Aleksey Pichugin, his former colleagues at the oil company Yukos. Khodorkovsky also renounced his right to Yukos assets that were seized by the state as part of the tax case against him and then incorporated into the state-owned oil firm Rosneft. Some of those assets were still being contested at an international tribunal. While Khodorkovsky's release boosted Russia's and Putin's image before the Winter Olympics in Sochi, scheduled for February 2014, his immediate exile—coming on the heels of a senior prosecutor's threat to pursue new charges against him¹—led to speculation that the Kremlin had forced Khodorkovsky to renounce his Yukos interests and any role in Russian politics in exchange for his freedom.²

The executive branch dominates the judicial and legislative branches, controlling all decisions of political significance. Of the 448 laws enacted in 2013, the government initiated 251 and the president 29, meaning nearly two-thirds of the bills adopted by the legislature came directly from the executive.³ Measures backed by the president typically pass quickly and with little discussion. The obedient courts held a number of show trials during the year to entangle the government's most articulate opponents in the legal system, and the law enforcement agencies were routinely used to enforce the leadership's political will. Although the Kremlin works to avoid angering the public with its policymaking, most decisions are taken behind closed doors. Elite groups may battle over policies, but there is little public accountability.

Groups of individuals now run the country to promote their particular interests rather than a broader national interest.⁴ The state apparatus, controlled by these groups, works like a monopolistic business enterprise with no checks on its activities. The Kremlin is eliminating areas of relative autonomy, such as the Academy of Sciences, independent universities, and the arbitration courts, while seeking to assert greater direct management to address growing inefficiencies. The newspaper *Vedomosti* has described the result as “control instead of development.”⁵

Following the large opposition protests in December 2011 and the spring of 2012 in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and many regional capitals, the president no longer seeks the support of urban liberals, who are relatively wealthy and well educated. Instead, he has focused on developing a core constituency among rural residents who tend to be conservative, less educated, and poor. In what was seen as an attempt to solidify support among such citizens, Putin on 30 June 2013 signed two laws banning “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” and blasphemy. The first law was ostensibly aimed at protecting minors, but it effectively criminalized any advocacy of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights or equality, and it also inspired some groups to target members of this community for violent attack.⁶ The blasphemy law banned vaguely defined acts that “express a clear lack of respect for society” or those whose goal is to “insult the religious feelings of believers.”⁷ While such legislation could be used to put additional restrictions on the opposition and free speech,⁸ it also bolstered the president’s image as a defender of traditional values and brought the government closer to the Russian Orthodox Church, which does not serve as a politically independent moral authority in Russian society.⁹

There is little democratic oversight of the security services, and both the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the police have grown more powerful as part of the Kremlin effort to marginalize the opposition. More recently, the Investigative Committee—controlled by Aleksandr Bastrykin, who went to law school with Putin—has become one of the key tools employed by the regime to silence its enemies.¹⁰ Despite their common repressive nature, there are considerable splits among these agencies. Whereas the FSB was once predominant, Putin was reportedly unhappy with its performance in preventing the mass protests of 2011–12 and has now given greater prominence to the Interior Ministry.¹¹ In addition, there is ongoing conflict between the Prosecutor General’s Office and the Investigative Committee.¹² The president does not have to issue specific orders for crackdowns, because the law enforcement agencies effectively compete with one other to enforce what they interpret as Putin’s will most effectively. Putin is then free to appear reasonable by criticizing the worst excesses while leaving the overall system in place. In November, former finance minister Aleksey Kudrin released a report proposing the abolition of the Investigative Committee, the Interior Ministry, and the Federal Drug Control Service and the redistribution of their powers to other entities at the federal, regional, and municipal levels.¹³ However, such decentralizing reforms seemed unlikely at year’s end.

Electoral Process

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

As in past years, the authorities manipulated elections in 2013 to ensure victory for their chosen candidates and block the opposition from taking office. All regional and local elections were held on the second Sunday in September, in keeping with a

2012 law. This schedule favored incumbents and the superior resources of Kremlin-backed politicians, as it forced all sides to campaign during the summer months, when many voters were on vacation or generally less attentive to political affairs.

United Russia won the eight gubernatorial elections held on 8 September. Among the victors was incumbent Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyenin, who has the status of regional governor. A former head of the presidential administration and a close Putin ally, Sobyenin had been appointed to the mayoralty in 2010. United Russia also won more than 70 percent of the seats, on average, in the 16 regions that held legislative elections in 2013.

In many cases, opposition candidates were prevented from running in the year's regional and local elections.¹⁴ Twenty-eight party lists—9.2 percent of the total nominated—were not registered. This represented an increase from 2.4 percent in 2012 and a return to earlier, more restrictive practices.¹⁵ In the governors' races, the candidates registered were largely limited to those who could collect the signatures of local United Russia legislators, as the current electoral law requires each gubernatorial candidate to gain the endorsement of at least 5 percent of local lawmakers. Only the Communist Party had enough incumbent officeholders to clear this hurdle in rare cases. Truly independent candidates were for the most part denied registration, usually on the basis of technicalities, such as female candidates submitting documents registered in their maiden names rather than their married names.¹⁶

However, the authorities allowed anticorruption blogger Aleksey Navalny to participate in the Moscow mayoral election. According to official results, he won 27.24 percent of the vote, a surprisingly large share given the controlled nature of the election; Navalny had no access to the main television stations, which lavished praise on his opponent.¹⁷ Since Sobyenin narrowly avoided a runoff by taking 51.37 percent of the vote, many opposition leaders assumed that the results were falsified by at least 2 percentage points.¹⁸ Navalny was allowed to compete only because Sobyenin ordered members of the city council to sign his campaign application. Although the approval of his candidacy was seen as an effort to boost the legitimacy of a predetermined process, Navalny used the opportunity to full effect. During the course of the campaign, he managed to raise more than 103 million rubles (\$3.1 million) from 16,706 contributors, a Russian record.¹⁹ In addition, 14,000 volunteers signed up to work for his campaign, demonstrating extensive unhappiness with the status quo. Navalny filed numerous complaints citing irregularities in the elections after the winner was announced, but all were dismissed by the authorities.

Yevgeniy Royzman was the most prominent opposition figure to win a mayoral election in 2013, though he succeeded in Yekaterinburg, where the unelected city manager wields most of the power. Navalny and Royzman both benefited from opponents who had been appointed to their posts from outside their regions, provoking distrust among local voters. In other notable opposition victories, Boris Nemtsov of the Republican Party of Russia–People's Freedom Party (RPR-Parnas) was elected to Yaroslavl's regional legislature, and Galina Shirshina, an independent backed by the liberal party Yabloko, was elected Petrozavodsk's mayor.

On 2 April, Putin signed a law that restricts the direct election of governors by allowing individual regions to opt for indirect gubernatorial elections instead. If the regional legislature votes to reject holding direct elections, the Russian president nominates three candidates, one of whom is then confirmed by the regional legislature.²⁰ Putin argued that direct elections, which had only been restored in 2012 after being abolished nationwide in 2004, could lead to ethnic violence in some regions.²¹ By the end of 2013, only republics in the North Caucasus area—Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Karachayevo-Cherkessiya—had adopted indirect elections, and they apparently did so under duress. On 18 April, the Dagestani parliament rejected the change in three rounds of secret voting. The measure finally succeeded when the speaker forced an open vote, allowing him to pressure the deputies.²² In January, Putin had replaced Dagestan governor Magomedsalam Magomedov, who supported the resumption of direct elections in the republic, with Ramazan Abdulatipov, who was more inclined to respect Kremlin wishes. Both Abdulatipov and incumbent Ingushetia governor Yunus-bek Yevkurov retained their posts when regional lawmakers approved their nominations on 8 September. The changes in the other republics took place after September, meaning they would be implemented in 2014. These developments seemed to reflect the Kremlin’s determination to maintain centralized control over the North Caucasus. By contrast, the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in the Volga district asserted their right to elect regional leaders directly.

Russia frequently changes its electoral laws to suit the needs of incumbents. There are ongoing discussions about scrapping the pure proportional-representation system for the State Duma—the lower house of the Federal Assembly—because of fears that the ruling United Russia party is too unpopular to win in 2016. Instead, the Duma could return to a system of 50 percent proportional representation and 50 percent single-member districts, or fill all seats through majoritarian contests in single-member districts.²³ These debates continued throughout the year, and a new law on Duma elections was expected in 2014.

Similar changes were already under way at the regional level. On 4 November, Putin signed a law allowing regional legislatures to lower the number of deputies elected on the basis of proportional representation to 25 percent from the current 50 percent, and making it possible to remove proportional representation completely from the Moscow and St. Petersburg city councils.²⁴ Sobyenin has already called for eliminating proportional representation in the capital, and the new provisions were expected to help Kremlin allies gain a majority of seats in the 2014 Moscow city council elections.²⁵

Civil Society

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75

After his election to a third presidential term was greeted with mass protests in 2012, Putin enacted a raft of new laws designed to suppress civil society activism in Russia.

The most prominent measure required all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that receive foreign funding and engage in vaguely defined “political activities” to register as “foreign agents.”²⁶ After the Justice Ministry was slow to implement the law, Putin demanded in February 2013 that the authorities proceed with enforcement, leading the Prosecutor General’s Office to conduct inspections of approximately 1,000 NGOs.²⁷ Ultimately, the inspectors identified 22 groups as “foreign agents.” However, when Putin declared that “political activities” should be more narrowly defined, the campaign stalled without officially ending, leaving NGOs vulnerable and uncertain as to when the next round of intimidation would begin.²⁸

By year’s end, the authorities had filed nine administrative cases against NGOs and an additional five administrative cases against NGO leaders for failing to register under the “foreign agents” law, according to Human Rights Watch.²⁹ Courts threw out the charges in 9 of the 14 cases, exonerating the Perm Regional Human Rights Center, the GRANI Center for Civic Analysis and Independent Research, the Perm Civic Chamber, the Side by Side LGBT Film Festival and its director, Coming Out (an LGBT group) and its director, and the Memorial Anti-Discrimination Center and its director.

The law and its uneven implementation seemed designed more to harass NGOs than to shut them down. However, in one notable enforcement action, the Justice Ministry dissolved the independent election-monitoring group Golos on 6 June, and its director, Liliya Shibanova, fled the country.³⁰ In July, the authorities charged the group with not paying its taxes in full.³¹ Members of the organization reconstituted it on 5 July, set up a new website, and helped to monitor the Moscow mayoral election in September, though they had greater difficulty continuing their work in the regions beyond the capital. The Kremlin apparently decided that it was not necessary to destroy Golos completely because it had accomplished the mission of marginalizing the group. In a separate case, the Kostroma Public Initiatives Support Center said at the end of October that it would have to shut down if it did not win a Constitutional Court appeal,³² still pending at year’s end, because it could not afford a 300,000 ruble (\$9,000) fine levied against it for failing to register as a foreign agent. The organization’s mission is to convene roundtable discussions, one of which included a representative of the U.S. embassy.

The Kremlin has sought to increase government funding for NGOs as a means of co-optation, and the amount now distributed through presidential grants has reached 3 billion rubles (\$90 million) per year.³³ Some of the money still goes to groups that are critical of the government, such as Memorial, the Moscow Helsinki Group, and For Human Rights. In some cases, such as with Memorial, the Levada Center, and the Soldiers’ Mothers Committee, the government is funding organizations that have been accused of being “foreign agents.”³⁴ The Kremlin declined to award Golos any money from the presidential grant fund in the first round of allocations in 2013,³⁵ but it gave the Golos Ural branch a grant in December.³⁶

The authorities have also used the threat of prosecution to reduce the number of activists participating in street protests against the regime. Charges were filed against 28 individuals for demonstrating on Moscow’s Bolotnaya Square on 6 May

2012, the day before Putin's inauguration, and many of those individuals remained entangled in the legal system during 2013.³⁷ Most of the defendants were accused of resisting or assaulting the police, but there was little evidence against them. The three who had been convicted by year's end received fairly heavy sentences: Mikhail Luzyanin, 4.5 years in prison; Konstantin Lebedev, 2.5 years in prison; and Mikhail Kosenko, indefinite psychiatric confinement.³⁸ (Other cases unrelated to the Bolotnaya protests suggest that the use of "punitive psychiatry" is becoming more common.³⁹) There was no evidence that Kosenko had committed the crimes he was accused of, and Amnesty International has declared him a prisoner of conscience, one of three in the Bolotnaya case. Aleksandr Dolmatov, a Bolotnaya protester who fled abroad to avoid arrest, committed suicide in the Netherlands in January after his asylum request was denied. In his December amnesty, Putin annulled the charges against four Bolotnaya defendants: Nikolay Kavkazsky, Mariya Baronova, Leonid Kovyazin, and Vladimir Akimenkov, releasing two from pretrial detention and one from house arrest, and lifting travel restrictions on another.⁴⁰ Of the remaining 20 defendants, 12 remained in pretrial detention, 1 was under house arrest, 6 did not have the right to travel, and 1 was living abroad. The most prominent of those still facing trial was Left Front leader Sergey Udaltsov, who was under house arrest. In September, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) gave priority status to appeals by some of the defendants based on the length of their pretrial detention and the conditions under which they were being held.⁴¹ An independent commission came to the conclusion that the authorities had staged the "riots" that took place amid the protest, which had been approved in advance.⁴²

When 28 members of Greenpeace, accompanied by 2 journalists and representing 18 different countries, protested Russian offshore oil production in the Arctic in September by trespassing at a drilling platform, border guards arrested and jailed them on charges of piracy, later reducing the charges to hooliganism.⁴³ After the environmentalists had languished in jail for many weeks and then were forced to remain in St. Petersburg while on bail, Putin amnestied them in late December as part of his effort to improve Russia's image ahead of the Sochi Olympics.

However, the broader crackdown on civil society continued. On 31 December, police arrested activist Sergey Mokhnatkin and charged him with attacking a police officer during a protest to support the constitutional guarantee of freedom of assembly. He had been arrested on the same charges in 2009, sentenced to 2.5 years in jail, declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, and pardoned by then president Dmitriy Medvedev in April 2012.⁴⁴

Part of the Kremlin's strategy in dealing with activists is to leave the door open for them to go into exile. Prominent economist Sergey Guriyev, who served as rector of the New Economic School, fled the country in May, fearing that he was about to be arrested for a report concluding that the second prison sentence imposed on Khodorkovsky had been unlawful. He had coauthored the document at the request of Medvedev's presidential human rights council.⁴⁵ (Other scholars from the Higher School of Economics who participated in the report and remain in Russia have come under intense pressure from the Investigative Committee.⁴⁶) Opposition

politician Garry Kasparov announced in June that he would not return to Russia for fear of being prosecuted in the Bolotnaya case,⁴⁷ while journalist Masha Gessen in August described how she had left Russia “when Putin declared war on gay families” like hers.⁴⁸ Rustem Adagamov, an opposition blogger whose LiveJournal.com site consistently ranked among the most read, reported in February that he had moved to Prague, having been accused of pedophilia.⁴⁹ And Konstantin Altunin fled the country in August after the authorities closed an exhibit showcasing one of his paintings, which depicted Putin and Medvedev in women’s underwear.⁵⁰

Academia has come under growing government pressure in recent years. On 27 September, the Kremlin ordered a reform of the Russian Academy of Sciences that forced its research institutes to report to a new federal agency and essentially took control of their property.⁵¹ The reform mandates that government officials, rather than scientists, allocate money for scientific research. Russian intellectuals charged that the changes gutted what had been a relatively independent research organization. However, the academy’s critics argued that Russia’s best scientists either work abroad or are not affiliated with the institution. Among its current members are politicians, like Viktor Ishayev, a former governor and presidential representative to the Far East, and exposed plagiarists.⁵² The authorities have also imposed new restrictions on scholars who receive grants from abroad. Such funding must now be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.⁵³

Although it does not receive much attention, Russia’s independent trade union movement is expanding and playing a more important role in political life. The authorities consider its strikes dangerous, as they express economic discontent among workers and could spark a larger political protest in the future, though ties between the unions and political organizations are growing only slowly.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, ill-treatment of migrant workers in the construction and agricultural sectors remains a major problem. The U.S. State Department’s 2013 *Trafficking in Persons Report* ranked Russia in Tier 3, the lowest category, for its problems with forced labor.⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch documented numerous abuses among workers preparing the Olympic sites in Sochi.⁵⁶

Migration from the Caucasus (including Russia’s North Caucasus) and Central Asia to the country’s urban centers has become a major point of debate in Russian society. Many feel that the immigrants threaten their safety and commit large numbers of murders and rapes in Russia. In July, Putin signed a law that imposed harsher fines—up to 7,000 rubles (\$210) in Moscow and St. Petersburg—on people who violate migration rules. Employers of illegal immigrants can be fined up to 1 million rubles (\$28,000), and the authorities must deport all illegal immigrants they find.⁵⁷ Public antipathy to immigrants boiled over during the Biryulyovo riot, which took place in a district of Moscow on 13 October after an Azerbaijani allegedly stabbed an ethnic Russian to death. However, in addition to xenophobia, the riot reflected popular views that the police and other state representatives are incompetent, corrupt, and not looking out for the local population.⁵⁸ After the riot, Moscow police arrested more than 1,600 immigrants,⁵⁹ but the rioters who had been targeting migrant communities largely enjoyed impunity.⁶⁰ During

the summer, police had conducted raids of Moscow markets and arrested 1,200 Vietnamese workers. Many were marooned in a makeshift tent camp for weeks while awaiting deportation.⁶¹

On 4 November, thousands of nationalists took part in the annual Russian March,⁶² which featured xenophobic, racist, and anti-LGBT chants, such as “Russia for the Russians” and “Stop Feeding the Caucasus,” as well as anti-Putin slogans.⁶³ Navalny has joined Putin in pandering to nationalist sentiments, supporting the Russian March if not participating in it, and disappointing many of his liberal supporters.⁶⁴ According to the Sova Center, 20 people were killed in racist and neo-Nazi attacks in 2013, one more than the year before.⁶⁵

Independent Media

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

The Kremlin in 2013 continued to control the most important medium in Russia, television, while exerting greater influence on the internet. Television was a major source of news for 88 percent of the population as of June 2013, down from 94 percent in August 2009, according to a Levada Center poll.⁶⁶ However, the proportion of people who said that they trusted television dropped from 79 percent to 51 percent during that period, while trust in news websites grew from 7 percent to 14 percent. Nevertheless, television is expected to remain popular even as newspapers decline through 2020.⁶⁷

Use of the internet continues to climb rapidly. More than 50 percent of Russian households have internet access,⁶⁸ and 59 percent of Russians use the internet daily or several times a week.⁶⁹ Twenty-six percent of the population uses the internet to track the latest news, up from 19 percent in 2011, and 16 percent use it to analyze events at home and abroad, up from 12 percent in 2011.

The lines between the traditional media and the internet are becoming blurred. Many of the most popular news sites are the web versions of newspapers like *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*, and news content has even penetrated social-networking websites. Reposting of independent press material makes up 38 percent of the repostings on politically oriented Facebook pages and more than half of those on similar VKontakte pages.⁷⁰ In addition, there are now television stations, like TV Dozhd (Rain), that broadcast mainly on the internet and have the freedom to show opposition figures, such as Navalny, who do not appear in the mainstream media.

However, the authorities continue to exert pressure to maintain control over media content. Rather than simply destroying outlets that carry independent views, officials typically use indirect means to bring them to heel. One target of such pressure has been Kommersant Publishing House owner Alisher Usmanov, whose wealth and investments in the metals industry make him vulnerable to Kremlin influence. Analysts have asserted that his *Kommersant* newspaper has grown less objective and toes the Kremlin line more closely than in the past.⁷¹ On 4 March,

two leading journalists in Usmanov's media empire lost their positions: Mikhail Kotov, editor in chief of *Gazeta.ru*, one of Russia's largest online newspapers, and Aleksey Vorobyev, head of *Kommersant FM*, an online radio station.⁷² In October, observers expressed concern over the appointment of Vladimir Zhelonkin, who has a background in media sponsored by the Orthodox Church and the military, as the new president of *Kommersant Publishing House*. The incumbent *Kommersant* newspaper editor, Mikhail Mikhailin, remained in place, and Usmanov claimed that the editorial line would not change.⁷³

The Kremlin has used more direct methods when dealing with state media. In a major reorganization announced on 9 December, Putin abolished the state-owned RIA Novosti news agency, which had developed a reputation for independent reporting, and folded it into a new, larger structure called *Rossiya Segodnya* (Russia Today). That entity will be run by pro-Kremlin television commentator Dmitriy Kiselyov and Margarita Simonyan, head of the state-owned international propaganda network RT.⁷⁴

In the case of TV Dozhd, the authorities have sought to exert influence in a variety of ways, including "telephone calls, scare tactics, and persuasion," according to founder and owner Natalya Sindeyeva.⁷⁵ The authorities also discourage corporations from buying advertisements on the channel.

Among other state tactics for controlling information online, the authorities block a wide range of sites that carry anti-Putin articles, Islamist views, and content deemed harmful to youth, on topics like suicide and drug abuse.⁷⁶ On 31 October, a Moscow court withdrew the license of the online news agency Rosbalt on the grounds that its website posted two videos containing obscene language that were taken from YouTube, which operates legally in Russia.⁷⁷ Rosbalt continued to operate through the end of the year pending an appeal. Officials also deploy "trolls" to post progovernment comments or disrupt opposition-oriented discussions. Such trolls are reportedly paid to write about 100 comments a day.⁷⁸ On 3 July, the president signed an antipiracy law that allows courts to put a temporary ban on websites if the holders of film copyrights believe the sites are distributing their products illegally. The bans can be put in place without any steps to verify whether the allegations are true.⁷⁹ While ostensibly aimed at protecting property rights, the law makes it possible to shut down websites arbitrarily.⁸⁰ Separately, on 30 December, Putin signed another law that eases website closures, allowing prosecutors to shut down sites deemed to promote rioting or contain extremist information within 24 hours, without a court order.⁸¹

The authorities are increasingly applying criminal laws to punish online dissent.⁸² Aksana Panova, former editor of the Yekaterinburg website *Ura.ru*, went on trial in July for allegedly extorting local businessmen, among other offenses. She pleaded guilty to a tax crime, but argued that the other charges were brought in retribution for her opposition to the regional governor, Yevgeniy Kuyvashev.⁸³ A verdict was pending at year's end.

The government has an extensive ability to monitor landlines, mobile phones, internet traffic, and other forms of communication through its SORM

system.⁸⁴ Roskomnadzor, Russia’s media and telecommunications regulator, has forced internet service providers (ISPs) to facilitate this surveillance. The number of transmissions monitored has greatly increased over time and was reportedly augmented extensively in preparation for the Sochi Olympics.

Russia remains a dangerous place for journalists to work. Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev, deputy editor and political commentator for the independent Russian-language weekly *Novoye Delo* and a regular contributor to the website Kavkaz-Uzel, was shot dead on 9 July in Dagestan. He wrote about Dagestani politics and human rights violations, including police abductions and torture of suspected Islamist militants.⁸⁵ At least 26 journalists have been killed in connection with their work since 2000, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, and nearly all such cases remain unsolved.

Fewer Russians spoke about politics in June 2013 than in March 1992, according to a Levada Center poll. In 1992, 28 percent of Russians said they discussed politics; in 1998, the figure was 25 percent; and by the middle of 2013, the proportion was down to 16 percent.⁸⁶ These results suggest that state efforts to control the media have had the intended effect of diverting people’s attention and energy to other topics.

Local Democratic Governance

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00

The central problem for local government in Russia is a lack of funding. Local governments have little ability to raise money on their own through taxes and fees, relying heavily on subsidies from the regional and federal governments. According to the Finance Ministry, municipalities received 60 percent of their revenues in 2012 through transfers and subsidies from federal and regional-level budgets.⁸⁷ The most important local source of funding was the personal income tax, at a flat rate of 13 percent, which provided 70 percent of municipal tax revenue. Other key taxes for municipalities are land taxes and the personal property tax. Municipalities are responsible for schools, health care, and a host of other social services.

Many Russian cities simply do not have the funds to cope with the responsibilities assigned to them. Following the economic crisis of 2008, local and regional tax income dropped. At the same time, Putin continued his populist policies, promising to increase public-sector employees’ salaries at the expense of regional budgets. Most regional governments, already facing deficits, were forced to take out loans without any real prospect of paying them back. At a meeting with mayors in October 2013, Putin said he was willing to discuss increasing the powers of local governments, but warned that “there is no money” for actually doing so.⁸⁸

In an effort to sideline elected mayors, higher authorities have steadily been replacing them with appointed city managers. More than 85 percent of Russian cities now have a bifurcated executive, with the mayor performing mainly ceremonial

functions and the city manager controlling the budget and city administration. The city managers are chosen by the city council, usually for two-year contracts, and are selected from a list of candidates prepared by a commission that includes at least some gubernatorial appointees.⁸⁹

Russian mayors remain highly vulnerable at the bottom of the country's political hierarchy. Opposition mayors are rare, and where they manage to take office, pressure from prosecutors is vigorous.⁹⁰ According to data gathered by political scientist Mikhail Tulsy, more than 100 mayors who opposed United Russia have been arrested over the last 10 years.⁹¹ These mayors may have originally been elected with the support of United Russia, but then came into conflict with their governor or the presidential administration. The most common charge is "exceeding official duties." In other cases, the mayor or one of his subordinates is accused of taking a bribe.

Until the election of Royzman in Yekaterinburg in September 2013, Yaroslavl mayor Yevgeniy Urlashov, elected in April 2012, was Russia's most prominent opposition mayor. He was arrested with four of his allies and charged with corruption on 2 July, remaining in a pretrial detention facility in Moscow through the end of 2013.⁹² On 5 July, the indirectly state-owned station NTV ran a documentary smearing Urlashov, adding to the impression that the case was politically motivated.⁹³ He had earlier announced plans to run for governor, and he intended to head a slate of candidates in the September 2013 elections for Yaroslavl's regional legislature as part of billionaire businessman Mikhail Prokhorov's Civic Platform party. He expected to win 40 percent of the vote, which would have been a humiliating defeat for United Russia.⁹⁴

On 15 November, the Investigative Committee arrested Astrakhan mayor Mikhail Stolyarov, a member of United Russia, claiming that he had extorted a large bribe from a real-estate developer.⁹⁵ Stolyarov took office in 2012 after a disputed election in which opposition politician Oleg Shein declared that he had won and was the rightful mayor. Navalny and other opposition leaders strongly supported Shein at the time. During his time in office, Stolyarov reportedly came into conflict with the region's governor, Aleksandr Zhilkin.⁹⁶

In a sign that the federal government is getting nervous about rising nationalism, Putin signed a law on 22 October giving governors more responsibility for handling relations between ethnic communities.⁹⁷ On 30 December, the president signed a law making it illegal to advocate separatism, a measure aimed at deterring ethnic Russians' calls to expel Muslim-majority republics in the North Caucasus from the Russian Federation.⁹⁸

Judicial Framework and Independence

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00

The lack of independent courts leaves Russia's political opposition vulnerable to constant pressure from the authorities. Putin's year-end amnesties of opposition

figures and activists did not represent a systematic reform of the Russian legal system, but instead seemed designed to show that the president could imprison or release his critics at will. Of the 70 people whom the human rights group Memorial designated as political prisoners in October, 33 remained in jail or under house arrest at the end of the year.⁹⁹

The Putin administration systematically uses the courts to harass a wide range of opposition groups. An ECHR ruling on 25 July found that Khodorkovsky's original trial was not politically motivated, but that various aspects of the proceedings had violated his rights.¹⁰⁰ Also that month, Navalny was tried on preposterous embezzlement charges in Kirov, found guilty, and jailed, but he was released the next day so that he could compete in the stage-managed Moscow mayoral election and lend it an appearance of legitimacy. After the election, his five-year prison sentence was suspended, but the terms of his probation barred him from running for office for five years. On 29 October, the Investigative Committee filed new charges against him, though they were widely seen as patently absurd.¹⁰¹

Such show trials, meant to intimidate and control government opponents, have become common. On 11 July, a Moscow district court found whistle-blowing lawyer Sergey Magnitsky, who had died nearly four years earlier, guilty of tax evasion. The trial was believed to be the first against a dead person in Russian or Soviet history.¹⁰² Magnitsky was convicted along with his former client, financier William F. Browder, who was tried in absentia. The lawyer had been imprisoned after accusing Russian officials of embezzling \$230 million from the treasury. He died in jail after being beaten and not receiving proper medical treatment for pancreatitis and gallbladder disease. The court apparently proceeded with the case against the dead man on the grounds that his mother said he was innocent in interviews with the press. Andreas Gross, a rapporteur for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who authored a report on the Magnitsky case, described it as "a massive cover-up involving senior officials of the competent Ministries, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Investigative Committee and even certain courts."¹⁰³ He argued that it demonstrated "how helpless individual citizens are once they are taken into custody. Many nameless detainees have suffered a similar fate without having had the country's best lawyers and a wealthy hedge fund manager to back them up." On 19 March, the Investigative Committee had closed its case examining the circumstances of Magnitsky's death, claiming that his pretrial detention had been legal and that he had died of heart complications.¹⁰⁴

In November, a report on the Russian legal system released by the Council of Europe pointed out that judges lacked independence because they were not properly shielded from undue pressure, including from within the judiciary.¹⁰⁵ The report found that "future reform efforts in the judiciary should focus on strengthening the right to a fair trial and on ensuring genuine adversarial proceedings and respect for the presumption of innocence." Under a 2002–03 legal reform, judges have strong incentives to decide cases quickly in a manner that will not lead to reversal by the higher courts, which usually means going along with the prosecutor.¹⁰⁶ Other problems highlighted by the report were the overuse of pretrial detention without

justification, the unusually high conviction rate (fewer than 1 percent of defendants are acquitted), and low public confidence in the justice system.

The situation for judicial independence only seems to be deteriorating. On 21 June, Putin called for the Supreme Arbitration Court, which oversees the country's commercial courts, to be merged with the Supreme Court, which heads the courts of general jurisdiction. The change, which required a constitutional amendment, was quickly working its way through the system at year's end.¹⁰⁷ The merger was expected to limit the independence of the commercial courts, which are considered the most independent, fair, and qualified courts in Russia and have ruled against the state more often than other courts.¹⁰⁸ At least 7 of 53 Supreme Arbitration Court judges had already resigned in protest by 10 October,¹⁰⁹ three days after the Kremlin submitted legislation on the change to the parliament, and Anton Ivanov, chairman of the Supreme Arbitration Court, strongly criticized the measure before the Duma began discussions on it.¹¹⁰ The business community is likely to suffer the most, since it will have fewer protections from the predations of corrupt bureaucrats. Under the new plan, a single "super court" comprising 170 judges would replace the existing Supreme Court and Supreme Arbitration Court, handling criminal, civil, administrative, and economic cases. Judges would have to take a test to sit on the new court, a requirement that provoked further criticism.

In October, the Kremlin submitted a bill that would restore law enforcement agencies' ability to open tax-related criminal cases without approval from the tax agency. This was the practice until 2011, when then president Medvedev ended it. In 2009 and 2010, there were 12,000 to 13,000 such tax cases filed, but the number fell to 2,000 in 2012. Putin's proposal would make businesses much more vulnerable to abuse by corrupt law enforcement agencies.¹¹¹ Medvedev criticized the initiative on 12 November.

In some cases, the courts have limited the Kremlin's power. On 10 October, the Constitutional Court overturned a 2012 law that banned people convicted of a crime from participating in politics for the rest of their lives, a measure that was apparently aimed at opposition figures like Khodorkovsky and Navalny.¹¹² The court limited the ban to the length of a convict's sentence, but the Duma soon began work on a bill that would impose bans of 10 to 15 years instead.¹¹³ In other decisions, the Constitutional Court in February recommended the removal of particularly harsh provisions of a June 2012 law on demonstrations that imposed high fines on demonstrators and undue burdens on organizers,¹¹⁴ and in April found that citizens had the right to appeal the counting of votes in their specific precinct.¹¹⁵

As of 28 March, there were 575,000 people serving prison terms in Russia, the smallest figure since the collapse of the Soviet Union, according to Justice Minister Aleksandr Konovalov.¹¹⁶ There were another 113,000 people in pretrial detention, and 469,000 registered with criminal enforcement inspectorates. Putin's December amnesty included two jailed members of the protest group Pussy Riot, Mariya Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova. While in prison, however, Tolokonnikova published an open letter to draw attention to inhumane conditions for Russian

inmates, including 16-hour work days, poor sanitation, and meals of rotten food.¹¹⁷ “I demand that we be treated like human beings, not slaves,” she wrote. She also engaged in a hunger strike and refused to work. Following the publication of the letter, she lost contact with her family for 26 days while being relocated from a Mordovia prison colony to a more remote facility in Krasnoyarsk.¹¹⁸

Other inmates remain in prison under questionable conditions. Taisiya Osipova, who is associated with the opposition movement Other Russia, was convicted in 2011 of drug possession, but maintains her innocence. In July, Russian authorities agreed to pay Osipova €4,600 (\$6,000) after the ECHR found that she had been subjected to “inhuman and degrading treatment” during pretrial detention.¹¹⁹

On 23 October, the Supreme Court rejected a finding by the ECHR that Aleksey Pichugin, the former head of security for Yukos who was sentenced to life in prison for murder, had not received a fair trial.¹²⁰ The decision formed part of a trend in which Russia is seeking to assert greater “judicial sovereignty.” The ECHR has received fewer cases from Russia in recent years.¹²¹ Some observers argue that a team of Russian lawyers, handpicked and paid by the Russian government to work for the court, is limiting the applications. The court claims that the lawyers are being monitored to ensure that their actions are proper, though such assurances are not universally accepted. In addition, new rules that the court introduced in June 2012 tightened the application process to limit the number of poorly prepared cases, which have clogged the institution in recent years.

On 4 November, Putin signed a law that increases the number of crimes considered to be “terrorism” and requires relatives of perpetrators to pay compensation for terrorist acts.¹²² Legal experts criticized the measure, saying it violated the presumption of innocence, marked a return to collective punishment, and would not deter terrorist acts. A terrorist attack in Volgograd killed seven people in October, and two more suicide bombings in the city on 29 and 30 December killed 34.

Corruption

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75

Since Putin came to power in 2000, the Kremlin has systematically blocked any serious efforts to fight corruption. Outside groups and the media, rather than the state bureaucracy alone, must provide oversight for anticorruption measures to be effective, but the government does not give them the autonomy to make a contribution. The result is that corruption continues to worsen as the country’s leaders disingenuously denounce it in their speeches.

Corruption in the government and business world is pervasive, and bureaucrats are generally able to act with impunity. According to Transparency International’s 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, 50 percent of respondents claimed that the level of corruption in Russia had increased over the past two years, with 37

percent saying it had worsened “significantly.” Only 5 percent thought that Russia’s anticorruption measures were effective.¹²³

The leadership frequently announces anticorruption campaigns, but their main purpose is to bring the elite into line and prevent the issue from mobilizing the opposition. In 2013, the presidential administration began an effort to check disparities between the incomes and expenditures of officials. It only checked cases where expenditures exceeded income by a factor of three. Overall, 14,400 officials fell into this category, and the vast majority of them, 12,700, claimed by way of explanation that they had bought property during that year. Ultimately, only 200 officials were fired.¹²⁴

In April, Putin signed a decree forcing state officials who are involved in setting policy that affects Russian sovereignty or national security to repatriate or give up any bank deposits or securities that they hold abroad, making their fortunes more reliant on the Kremlin’s good favor.¹²⁵ The ban extends to all executive, legislative, and judicial officials and employees of state-owned companies, as well as to their spouses and minor children. The state bank VTB 24 reported a jump in deposits before the 17 August deadline. There are no restrictions on holding foreign real estate, although the owners must declare it. Critics said the law’s measures could be easily circumvented—for instance, by using intermediaries to obscure ownership of assets.¹²⁶

On 3 December, the presidential administration announced the creation of a new office to spearhead the fight against corruption.¹²⁷ The head of the new department, Oleg Plokhoi, has a background in the Soviet-era Committee for State Security (KGB). His responsibilities will include coordinating the implementation of anticorruption efforts at all levels of government, but descriptions of his office did not suggest that the Kremlin would be doing anything new.¹²⁸ In fact, the creation of the office merely indicated that past efforts to reduce graft were not working.¹²⁹

Navalny’s efforts to expose corrupt practices have achieved more high-profile results. Vladimir Pekhtin, a United Russia member and chairman of the State Duma’s ethics committee, had to resign in February after Navalny published documents showing that he owned real estate in Florida valued at more than \$1.3 million, which he had not disclosed as required.¹³⁰ Several other members of parliament also resigned in quick succession, including Anatoliy Lomakin, a billionaire businessman.

The failure of small business to thrive in Russia is another indicator of the costs and ubiquity of corruption. According to business ombudsman Boris Titov, prosecutors opened 600,000 criminal cases against entrepreneurs over the last three years, and 110,924 of them led to prison terms.¹³¹ Many of these cases are examples of “raiding,” in which law enforcement agencies are used to steal the property of successful businessmen. Titov lobbied for a plan to amnesty 100,000 entrepreneurs serving prison sentences for white-collar crimes, but those efforts were not successful. As a result of these problems and of a heavy burden from bureaucrats and inspectors of all varieties, only 2 percent of Russian respondents in

a recent survey said they had considered starting their own business. The average for countries with a similar income level was around 26 percent.¹³²

Russian state policy on migration serves the interests of key officeholders, including some billionaires in the parliament, by feeding corruption. On one hand, the Kremlin encourages migration, bringing in many workers from Central Asia—who are typically employed in the service and construction sectors—by maintaining a visa-free regime. On the other hand, the regime sets the Russian population against the migrants, often supporting nationalist groups who oppose the influx.¹³³ The authorities turn a blind eye to the extensive exploitation of the migrants, who work long hours for low pay and often are forced to live in squalid conditions. Much of the money siphoned off as a result of this process comes from the state budget. Street sweepers, for example, get a miserly wage and live in poor conditions, while public officials and the police benefit from the money that had been set aside in the city budget to pay them.

Preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi stood out in 2013 as a vehicle for corruption on an unprecedented scale. Early estimates for the total cost topped \$50 billion, with much of the money going to construction projects that appeared to be overpriced. A documentary film released in November alleged that officials had demanded massive kickbacks from contractors, among other abuses.¹³⁴

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