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Freedom in the World 2020

Russia

20
/100

NOT FREE

<u>Political Rights</u>	5/40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	15/60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

20 /100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)



Overview

Power in Russia's authoritarian political system is concentrated in the hands of President Vladimir Putin. With loyalist security forces, a subservient judiciary, a

controlled media environment, and a legislature consisting of a ruling party and pliable opposition factions, the Kremlin is able to manipulate elections and suppress genuine dissent. Rampant corruption facilitates shifting links among bureaucrats and organized crime groups.

Key Developments in 2019

- Kremlin-backed candidates won every gubernatorial race in 2019, but sustained losses in regional elections and in Moscow. The election campaign was marred by intimidation and violence against both protesters and journalists covering events.
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and journalists remained under severe threat throughout 2019. The government continued to harass them by branding them as foreign agents or undesirable organizations, fining them, and intimidating them with police raids and arrests.
- LGBT+ residents and activists were targeted with renewed campaigns of violence and intimidation. The year began with a crackdown on a group of LGBT+ social media users in Chechnya, leading to multiple arrests and two deaths at the hands of police. In the summer, activist Yelena Grigoryeva was murdered in St. Petersburg, deepening fears over an anti-LGBT+ hit list.
- A crackdown on Jehovah's Witnesses expanded in 2019, with worshippers receiving long prison sentences under anti-extremism laws. Baptists were also subject to increased government interference.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

The 1993 constitution established a strong presidency with the power to dismiss and appoint, pending parliamentary confirmation, the prime minister. The

president is elected to a six-year term, and can be reelected to one additional term. As with his past elections, President Putin's campaign for a second term in 2018 benefited from advantages including preferential media treatment, numerous abuses of incumbency, and procedural irregularities during the vote count. His most potent rival, Aleksey Navalny, was disqualified before the campaign began due to a politically motivated criminal conviction, creating what the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) called "a lack of genuine competition." The funding sources for Putin's campaign were also notably opaque. He was ultimately credited with 77 percent of the vote, followed by the Communist Party's Pavel Grudinin with 12 percent, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) with 6 percent, and five others—including token liberals—who divided the remainder.

In September 2019's local and regional elections, the Kremlin used those advantages to win all 16 governors' races, a year after four gubernatorial candidates backed by Putin's United Russia party were unexpectedly forced into runoffs. That 2018 vote coincided with nationwide protests over controversial pension reforms. This time, the Kremlin worked to eliminate any serious opposition candidates before the election took place, according to Russian electoral watchdog Golos. United Russia nevertheless sustained losses in regional races, earning under 50 percent of the vote in 5 of 12 regions including Moscow. Navalny's Smart Voting campaign, an initiative that helped voters identify the strongest non-United Russia candidate in each race, effectively concentrated opposition votes to combat the pro-Kremlin slate. However, the main beneficiaries were government-sanctioned opposition parties, with some exceptions in lower levels of government. The Kremlin retaliated days after the election, raiding 42 regional offices of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and the homes of many of its regional coordinators.

A2 o-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

The Federal Assembly consists of the 450-seat State Duma and an upper chamber, the 170-seat Federation Council. Half the members of the upper chamber are appointed by governors and half by regional legislatures, usually with strong federal

input. Half of Duma members are elected by nationwide proportional representation and the other half in single-member districts, with all serving five-year terms.

In the 2016 Duma elections, United Russia won 343 seats, securing a supermajority that allows it to change the constitution without the support of other parties. The three main Kremlin-approved “opposition” parties—the Communists, LDPR, and A Just Russia—won the bulk of the remainder, taking 42, 39, and 23 seats, respectively. The Central Electoral Commission reported a turnout of 48 percent, the lowest in Russia’s post-Soviet history. The OSCE and the election monitoring group Golos cited numerous violations, including ballot stuffing, pressure on voters, and illegal campaigning. Some opposition candidates were simply not permitted to register, so the outcome of many races was clear even before election day.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

0 / 4

Russia’s electoral system is designed to maintain the dominance of United Russia. The authorities make frequent changes in the laws and the timing of elections in order to ensure that their preferred candidates will have maximum advantage. Opposition candidates have little chance of success in appealing these decisions, or securing a level playing field.

Since 2011, only locally elected politicians have been eligible to serve in the Federation Council; the change was designed to benefit United Russia, as most local officeholders are party members. The current mixed electoral system for the Duma was adopted following the 2011 elections, when United Russia garnered just less than 50 percent of the vote under a system that used only nationwide proportional representation. This and other rule changes were considered to have contributed to United Russia’s supermajority in 2016.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?	1/4
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The multiparty system is carefully managed by the Kremlin, which tolerates only superficial competition against the dominant United Russia party. Legislation enacted in 2012 liberalized party registration rules, allowing the creation of hundreds of new parties. However, none posed a significant threat to the authorities, and many seemed designed to encourage division and confusion among the opposition. In 2018, the Justice Ministry refused once again to register Navalny's political party. He has been attempting to register since 2012, but his applications were always delayed or rejected based on technicalities. Navalny's group encountered similar treatment in 2019, with his allies finding themselves barred from participating in Moscow's local elections.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?	0/4
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Russia has never experienced a democratic transfer of power between rival groups. Putin, then the prime minister, initially received the presidency on an acting basis from the retiring Boris Yeltsin at the end of 1999. He served two four-year presidential terms from 2000 to 2008, then remained the de facto paramount leader while working as prime minister until he returned to the presidency in 2012, violating the spirit if not the letter of the constitution's two-term limit. A 2008 constitutional amendment extended presidential terms to six years, meaning Putin's current term will leave him in office until 2024.

Opposition politicians and activists are frequently targeted with fabricated criminal cases and other forms of administrative harassment that are apparently designed to prevent their participation in the political process. For example, Aleksey Navalny was “administratively arrested” for 30 days in July after his call for a peaceful rally. A key aide was arrested a month before.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	1 / 4
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Russia’s numerous security agencies work to maintain tight control over society and prevent any political challenges to the incumbent regime. The country’s leadership is also closely intertwined with powerful economic oligarchs, who benefit from government patronage in exchange for political loyalty and various forms of service. The Russian Orthodox Church similarly works to support the status quo, receiving financial support and a privileged status in return.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	1 / 4
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The formation of parties based on ethnicity or religion is not permitted by law. In practice, many ethnic minority regions are carefully monitored and controlled by federal authorities. Defenders of minority languages have sought to protect the right to teach them in public schools, with one Udmurt activist resorting to self-immolation in September 2019. Most republics in the restive North Caucasus area and some autonomous districts in energy-rich western Siberia have opted out of direct gubernatorial elections; instead, their legislatures choose a governor from candidates proposed by the president.

Women are underrepresented in politics and government. They hold less than a fifth of seats in the State Duma and the Federation Council. Only 2 of 29 cabinet members are women.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

Russia's authoritarian president dominates the political system, along with powerful allies in the security services and in business. These groups effectively control the output of the parliament, which is not freely elected. The federal authorities have limited ability to impose policy decisions in Chechnya, where Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has gained unchecked power in exchange for keeping the republic within the Russian Federation. A summer 2019 poll by the Levada Center, an independent polling and research organization, showed that just 19 percent of Russians felt they could influence federal policy and 31 percent said they could influence regional or local decision-making.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

Corruption in the government and the business world is pervasive, and a growing lack of accountability enables bureaucrats to engage in malfeasance with impunity. Many analysts have argued that the political system is essentially a kleptocracy, a regime whose defining characteristic is the plunder of public wealth by ruling elites. Some of these elites openly work to fulfill President Putin's policy aims and receive government contracts and protection from prosecution in return for their loyalty.

Navalny's FBK has posted a series of videos exposing graft among leading figures over several years, most recently on Andrei Kostin, chief executive of state-owned lender VTB. In response to the exposé on Kostin, federal police raided FBK headquarters in Moscow in late December 2019, seizing computer equipment and notes.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	1/4
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There is little transparency and accountability in the day-to-day workings of the government. Decisions are adopted behind closed doors by a small group of individuals whose identities are often unclear to the public, and announced to the population after the fact.

In June 2018, as many citizens celebrated the opening of soccer's World Cup tournament in Russia, the government announced legislation to raise the retirement age and delay pension eligibility, allowing for essentially no public discussion. After authorities suppressed protests against the deeply unpopular changes and offered symbolic concessions, the final bill was adopted in September, and the president signed it that October.

Similar behavior was apparent that September, when Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, his counterpart in the North Caucasus region of Ingushetia, redrew their shared border in secret talks. Ingush protesters faced intimidation and arrests to protest the protocol in March 2019. Yekurov resigned in June, only to be named President Putin's deputy defense minister in July.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	0/4
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Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech, vague laws on extremism grant the authorities great discretion to crack down on any speech, organization, or activity that lacks official support. The government controls, directly or through state-owned companies and friendly business magnates, all of

the national television networks and many radio and print outlets, as well as most of the media advertising market. A handful of independent outlets still operate, most of them online and some headquartered abroad. Television remains the most popular source of news, but its influence is declining, particularly among young people who rely more on social networks.

Attacks, arrests, office raids, and threats against journalists are common. In late July 2019, five journalists covering preelection protests in Moscow were physically attacked by police. By August, at least 14 journalists covering the protests were detained, in one case even after their accreditation was found.

Authorities actively targeted journalists outside of Moscow throughout 2019. In early June, Meduza journalist Ivan Golunov was arrested for alleged drug possession. Colleagues and activists successfully campaigned for his release and the dismissal of charges later that month. Igor Rudnikov, editor in chief of Kaliningrad based newspaper *Novye Kolesa*, spent a year and a half in pretrial detention on allegations that he extracted a bribe, which he denied. Ultimately, the court reduced the charge and freed him on the basis of time served in mid-June. *Novye Kolesa* reported on the extravagant lifestyle of General Viktor Ledenev, an intelligence veteran and senior law enforcement official.

In September, Alexandr Nikishin's home in the southwestern city of Saratov was raided, and he was interrogated for his work reporting on opposition politicians. The police then confiscated Nikishin's hard drive and cell phones. In October, police raided the offices of Dagestan's *Chernovik*, a weekly newspaper that reported on authorities' abuse of terrorism charges to harass Muslims in the North Caucasus republic.

In late May, 11 political journalists resigned from *Kommersant* to protest the firing of two colleagues and intervention into their work by the paper's owner, Kremlin-connected oligarch Alisher Usmanov. In a Facebook post, a journalist collective of the paper warned readers that they were no longer in a position to report on Russian politics.

The year also saw new legislation meant to limit the free press: in July, the State Duma considered legislation that would limit foreign ownership of popular Russian websites to 20 percent. The bill, which even garnered criticism from communications minister Konstantin Noskov, was assumed to target popular

search engine and news aggregator Yandex, which maintains a headquarters in the Netherlands. In December, Putin again tightened his grip on the press by signing legislation allowing the government to declare journalists who work for outlets identified as foreign agents as foreign agents themselves.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	1/4
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Freedom of religion is respected unevenly. A 1997 law on religion gives the state extensive control and makes it difficult for new or independent groups to operate. The Russian Orthodox Church has a privileged position, working closely with the government on foreign and domestic policy priorities.

Regional authorities continue to harass non-Orthodox groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Antiterror legislation approved in 2016 grants the authorities power to repress religious groups that are deemed extremist. In 2017, the Supreme Court upheld the Justice Ministry's decision to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses, who number 170,000 in Russia, as an extremist organization. The decision heralded a protracted campaign against the worshippers, marked by surveillance, property seizures, arrests, and torture. More than 80 were subjected to detention, house arrest, or restricted liberty by the end of 2018, and thousands fled abroad.

In February 2019, Danish-born Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen was the first to receive a prison term for extremism. By the end of 2019, another eight Jehovah's Witnesses were given prison sentences, ranging from two to six years. In November, the group claimed 251 members faced criminal charges (with 41 in pretrial detention or prison, 23 under house arrest, and at least 100 facing other restrictions).

Baptist worshipers, who were previously spared such treatment, are also experiencing the beginnings of a crackdown. In April, authorities raided a Baptist church near the city of Novorossiysk, subsequently accusing their pastor of illegal missionary work.

Many Muslims have been detained in recent years for alleged membership in banned Islamist groups including Hizb ut-Tahrir.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

1/4

The higher education system and the government-controlled Academy of Sciences are hampered by bureaucratic interference, state-imposed international isolation, and increasing pressure to toe the Kremlin line on politically sensitive topics, though some academics still express dissenting views. In July 2019, the Ministry of Education issued rules forcing academics to seek permission from supervisors for any planned meeting with foreigners. The rules required academics to file a report after the meeting and for two Russians to be present at all meetings with foreign scholars. Pushback from numerous academics apparently limited the implementation of the rule, but the intention to limit contact with foreigners was clear. In November the authorities raided the prestigious Lebedev Physics Institute, allegedly pursuing a case of illegal technology exports.

Stalinist-era historians have faced pressure from the regime. Museum director Sergey Koltyrin received a 9-year sentence over child-abuse allegations in May, after criticizing the government for excavating land at Sandarmokh; the government claims a mass shooting of Soviet soldiers by Finns took place there during World War II. Yury Dmitriyev, head of the Karelia branch of human rights research and advocacy group Memorial, remained on trial for child abuse charges at year's end, and has been in custody since 2018. Dmitriyev maintained his innocence, instead alleging retribution for his work investigating Soviet-era crimes.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1/4

Pervasive, hyperpatriotic propaganda and political repression—particularly since Russian forces' invasion of Ukraine in 2014—have had a cumulative impact on open

and free private discussion, and the chilling effect is exacerbated by growing state efforts to control expression on the internet.

The government's surveillance capabilities have increased significantly in recent years, and while most citizens are not subject to regular state supervision, authorities are thought to monitor the activities and personal communications of activists, journalists, and opposition members, according to human rights organization Agora.

In March 2019, authorities adopted a law imposing fines for insulting officials or state symbols through the use of electronic media. The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights called the law vague, warning it was subject to abuse. By early October, prosecutors filed 46 cases, most of them for insulting Putin.

In November, Russia enacted a "sovereign internet" law, which requires internet service providers (ISPs) to closely track and reroute traffic at the government's behest.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	1/4
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The government restricts freedom of assembly. Overwhelming police responses, the use of force, routine arrests, and harsh fines and prison sentences have discouraged unsanctioned protests, while pro-Kremlin groups are able to demonstrate freely. Despite the risks, thousands of people have turned out for a series of antigovernment demonstrations in recent years.

In the run-up to 2019's local elections in Moscow, the authorities pursued numerous legal cases, collectively known as the Moscow Affair, in order to discourage protests. Nevertheless, 10,000 participated in a late July rally, the

largest anti-Putin gathering since 2012. Authorities responded by arresting over 1,400 people. Ultimately, 14 protesters were convicted and 11 received prison terms ranging from one to five and a half years. A late August protest in Moscow was unusually peaceful, with local police refraining from mass arrests.

In May 2019, protesters in the city of Yekaterinburg succeeded in blocking the state government from building a new church in a popular park that citizens sought to keep open.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

0 / 4

The government continued its relentless campaign against NGOs in 2019. Authorities impede activities in part by requiring groups that receive foreign funding and are deemed to engage in political activity to register as “foreign agents.” This designation, which is interpreted by much of the Russian public as denoting a foreign spying operation, mandates onerous registration requirements, obliges groups to tag their materials with a “foreign agent” label, and generally makes it extremely difficult for them to pursue their objectives. By the end of 2019, the Justice Ministry classified 74 groups as “foreign agents,” including Navalny’s FBK.

Separately, a total of 19 foreign NGOs have been deemed “undesirable organizations” on the grounds that they threaten national security, including the Free Russia Foundation, Ukrainian World Congress, the Atlantic Council, and the Czech People in Need in 2019. This designation gives authorities the power to issue a range of sanctions against the blacklisted groups and individuals who work with them.

Other forms of harassment and intimidation hinder NGO activities. The head of Memorial’s Chechnya office, Oyub Titiyev, was detained for alleged possession of illegal drugs in January 2018 and sentenced to four years in prison that March, before he was paroled in June. In November, the Supreme Court ordered the closure of prominent organization For Human Rights, led by activist Lev Ponomaryov. The government itself previously provided funding to the group

before it ran afoul of the foreign agent registry. That same month, a Moscow court closed the Center for Support of Indigenous People of the North/Russian Indigenous Training Center, a group that had supported indigenous rights.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	2 / 4
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While trade union rights are legally protected, they are limited in practice. Strikes and worker protests have occurred in prominent industries, including automobile manufacturing, but anti-union discrimination and reprisals are common. Employers often ignore collective-bargaining rights. The largest labor federation works in close cooperation with the Kremlin, though independent unions are active in some industrial sectors and regions.

In 2018, a St. Petersburg court liquidated the independent Interregional Trade Union Workers' Association (ITUWA), accusing it of improperly accepting foreign funds. The 4,000-strong group gained prominence for a series of strikes at a Ford plant in 2007 that served as a model for subsequent strikes. However, the Supreme Court overturned the dissolution later that year.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	1 / 4
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The judiciary lacks independence from the executive branch, and career advancement is effectively tied to compliance with Kremlin preferences. The Presidential Personnel Commission and court chairmen control the appointment and reappointment of the country's judges, who tend to be promoted from inside the judicial system rather than gaining independent experience as lawyers.

F2 0-4 pts

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Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

1/4

Safeguards against arbitrary arrest and other due process guarantees are regularly violated, particularly for individuals who oppose or are perceived as threatening the interests of the political leadership and its allies. Many Russians have consequently sought justice from international courts, but a 2015 law authorizes the Russian judiciary to overrule the decisions of such bodies, and it has since done so on a number of occasions.

Russian courts also adjudicated the cases of defendants living in Ukraine in 2019. Crimean Tatars accused of membership in Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in Russia but not in Ukraine, were tried by Russian courts throughout the year; at least 20 were handed prison terms by year's end. Many Crimean Tatars have faced extremism or terrorism charges in Russian courts, which outside observers consider disproportionate or fabricated. Blogger Nariman Memedeminov was tried and sentenced for terrorist activity in October 2019 after he covered the trials of other Crimean Tatar activists on his YouTube channel.

Memorial counted 305 people as political or religious prisoners at the end of 2019, a marked rise from its 2018 count of 195 prisoners. Those counted included participants of the 2019 Moscow election protests, human rights activists, and advocates for ethnic minority groups.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0/4

Use of excessive force by police is widespread, and rights groups have reported that law enforcement agents who carry out such abuses have deliberately employed electric shocks, suffocation, and the stretching of a detainee's body so as to avoid leaving visible injuries. Prisons are overcrowded and unsanitary; inmates lack access to health care and are subject to abuse by guards. In August 2018, *Novaya Gazeta* posted videos of guards engaging in organized beatings of prisoners in Yaroslavl. The authorities arrested at least 12 guards at the prison after a public outcry, but the NGO Public Verdict reported systematic abuse at another

prison in the region in December. In July 2019, Public Verdict released another video showing continued abuse at Yaroslavl.

In November 2019, an ethnic Tatar prisoner, Airat Shakirov, went on a hunger strike in a penal colony in Vologda; his mother claimed that Shakirov, who is imprisoned over his alleged membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, was placed in solitary confinement because he declined to serve as a prison informant.

Parts of the country, especially the North Caucasus, suffer from high levels of violence; victims include officials, Islamist insurgents, and civilians. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov is accused of using abductions, torture, extrajudicial killings, and other forms of violence to maintain control. This activity sometimes occurs beyond Russian borders: Kadyrov is suspected of arranging the assassination of asylum-seekers and political opponents who have fled the country.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0/4

Immigrants and ethnic minorities—particularly those who appear to be from the Caucasus or Central Asia—face governmental and societal discrimination and harassment.

LGBT+ people are also subject to considerable discrimination, which has worsened in the last decade. Since 2013, a federal law banning the dissemination of information on “nontraditional sexual relationships” has been in force, making public discussion on homosexuality illegal. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled the law discriminatory in 2017, saying it violated freedom of expression. The ECHR also ruled that Russia was violating human rights by prohibiting LGBT+ demonstrations in 2018. Nevertheless, the law remains in force.

The Sova Center, which tracks hate crimes in Russia, reported the death of one LGBT+ activist and five injuries in hate-based attacks in 2019, but official statistics on such offenses are not maintained. The July murder of activist Yelena Grigoryeva brought to public attention the existence of hate group Saw, which circulates an online “hit list” of advocates; Grigoryeva’s name was added days before she was killed.

Chechnya remains particularly dangerous for LGBT+ people, with authorities launching a crackdown in January 2019 that ensnared nearly 40 people. According to the Russian LGBT Network, an LGBT+ advocacy group, they were identified when police seized the phone of an LGBT+ social media group's administrator and accessed its contacts. Two detainees reportedly died after they were tortured by police.

In May, Maksim Lapunov became the first survivor of a previous 2017 crackdown to file charges at the ECHR, after efforts to have his case heard in Russia failed. In December, LGBT+ and feminist activist Yulia Tsvetkova was placed under house arrest in Khabarovsk on charges of distributing pornography. She faces a 6-year prison sentence if convicted. Earlier in 2019, Tsvetkova was fined 50,000 rubles (\$720) for administrating two social media pages, one featuring the work of female artists and the other tackling LGBT+ issues.

A rare victory for LGBT+ rights was recorded in April, when a St. Petersburg court ruled that a transgender woman was illegally dismissed from her job; her employer was ordered to reinstate her.

Despite some legal guarantees of gender equality, women continue to face various forms of discrimination. In July 2018, the State Duma rejected a bill first drafted in 2003 that would have expanded employment protections for women, in part by setting a definition for sexual harassment as unwanted sexual attention. The only existing law on the topic is a criminal code article that addresses the use of coercion to compel a person to perform sexual acts.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

2/4

The government places some restrictions on freedoms of movement and residence. Adults must carry internal passports while traveling and to obtain many

government services. Some regional authorities impose registration rules that limit the right of citizens to choose their place of residence, typically targeting ethnic minorities and migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Most Russians are free to travel abroad, but more than 4 million employees tied to the military and security services were banned from foreign travel under rules issued in 2014.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?	1/4
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Power and property are intimately connected, with senior officials often using their government positions to amass vast property holdings. State takeovers of key industries and large tax penalties imposed on select companies after dubious legal proceedings have illustrated the precarious nature of property rights under Putin's rule, especially when political interests are involved. Private businesses more broadly are routinely targeted for extortion or expropriation by law enforcement officials and organized criminal groups.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?	2/4
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Domestic violence receives little attention from the authorities. Instead, domestic violence survivors who kill abusers in self-defense are commonly imprisoned; as many as 80 percent of women imprisoned in Russia may fall under this category. In 2017, Putin signed a law that decriminalized acts of domestic violence that do not result in permanent physical harm. The new law also relieved police from the obligation of automatically opening domestic violence cases, transferring that burden to survivors.

Official tolerance of domestic violence was put to the test when Muscovite sisters Angelina, Krestina, and Maria Khachatryan were charged with their father's 2018 murder, despite a subsequent investigation revealing his history of physical and

sexual abuse. The case sparked controversy in Russia, fostering protests and calls for legal reform. In December 2019, murder charges were recommended against the two older sisters, Krestina and Angelina; their case remained open at year's end.

Residents of certain regions, particularly in the North Caucasus, face tighter societal restrictions on personal appearance and relationships, and some so-called honor killings have been reported. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has spoken in favor of polygamy and sought to compel divorced couples to remarry.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2/4

Legal protections against labor exploitation are poorly enforced. Migrant workers are often exposed to unsafe or exploitative working conditions. At least 21 workers reportedly died in accidents at World Cup construction sites ahead of the 2018 tournament. Both Russians facing economic hardship and migrants to Russia from other countries are vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking.



On Russia

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

20/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

31/100 **Not Free**

Other Years

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