

Russia

by Robert W. Ortung

Capital: Moscow
Population: 143 million
GNI/capita, PPP: US\$21,210

Source: The data above are drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2013*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Electoral Process	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50
Independent Media Governance*	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
National Democratic Governance	n/a	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.75	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00
Corruption	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Democracy Score	5.25	5.61	5.75	5.86	5.96	6.11	6.14	6.18	6.18	6.21

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in May 2012 after winning the deeply flawed 4 March election. In response to growing civil society activism and an increasingly outspoken protest movement, he immediately adopted a series of repressive measures. The government imposed draconian new fees on people arrested for participating in unsanctioned demonstrations, recriminalized slander, enacted legislation labeling nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with funding from abroad as “foreign agents,” introduced a new mechanism for blocking websites, and expanded the definition of treason to include many forms of contact with foreigners and international organizations. Putin also worked to hollow out political concessions made earlier. For example, a law signed in May allowed the first direct gubernatorial elections in eight years, but the Kremlin used a screening system built into the legislation to eliminate the strongest opposition candidates and ensure victory for representatives of the ruling United Russia party.

Citizen activists sought ways to counter this state crackdown. The most prominent leaders used internet-based voting to set up a Coordinating Council tasked with facilitating opposition cooperation in future elections and institutionalizing resistance to the regime. However, the movement faced stiff headwinds. The authorities used their control of the national television networks to disseminate propaganda aimed at undermining the credibility of the opposition in the eyes of the broader public.

Meanwhile, systemic corruption, from the heights of the energy industry to the most mundane aspects of municipal government, transferred a considerable share of the country’s wealth into the accounts of well-connected individuals, limiting spending on social needs and hindering attempts to diversify the economy beyond extractive industries.

National Democratic Governance. Putin returned to the Kremlin with the intention of maintaining the basic contours of the authoritarian system that he has built since 2000, while ensuring the continued protection of his closest associates, who have enriched themselves through corruption. He worked assiduously to eliminate the appearance of any potential opposition that could challenge his rule, bolstering the impression that there is no viable alternative to him. The parliament remained wholly subordinate to the executive branch, doing its bidding with little resistance. Because the return of Putin from the premiership to the presidency has simply extended the repressive tendencies that were already apparent in the system he created, *Russia’s rating for national democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.50.*

Electoral Process. The presidential election was deeply flawed and roundly condemned by international monitors. The Kremlin eliminated Putin's potential opponents using technicalities, bolstered his candidacy with skewed media coverage, and manipulated the voting to ensure his victory. Statistical analyses raised serious questions about areas where voter turnout reached nearly 100 percent, with overwhelming support recorded for Putin. Separately, the president signed legislation placing all future regional elections on a single date in September, forcing the opposition to campaign during the summer months, when voters are least likely to be paying attention. Given the tightly controlled and superficial character of its elections, *Russia's rating for electoral process remains unchanged at 6.75.*

Civil Society. In a trend apparent since 2010, Russian citizens continued to assert their right to shape public policy and their willingness to mobilize in support of civic goals in 2012. Key opposition leaders set up a Coordinating Council, young activists won seats in municipal councils, and volunteers organized to help flood victims. However, civil society faced strong resistance from the state, which targeted NGOs with new legislation that made it difficult for them to obtain independent funding. Groups with non-Russian funding were labeled as "foreign agents," and sponsor entities such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) were compelled to withdraw from the country. Draconian new fines for participating in unsanctioned rallies and an expansion of the definition of treason were designed to deter ordinary citizens from criticizing their leaders or cooperating with international organizations. Because of the state's aggressive pushback against the increased activism of recent years, *Russia's rating for civil society declines from 5.25 to 5.50.*

Independent Media. The government sought to limit the scope of independent media in 2012 by detaining journalists at protest rallies, imposing new limits on internet content, and recriminalizing libel. The authorities used their control of the television broadcast networks to undermine the credibility of the opposition through smear campaigns and tendentious documentaries such as "Anatomy of a Protest." While several independent news outlets continued to function, they faced harassment and political pressure. A deputy editor of the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* was directly threatened by a senior law enforcement official, for instance, and changes to the board of the indirectly state-owned Ekho Moskvy made it easier to fire the radio station's editor. Due to these ongoing repressive measures, *Russia's rating for independent media remains unchanged at 6.25.*

Local Democratic Governance. The return of gubernatorial elections, which had been replaced with a system of presidential appointments in 2004, brought little change to the central authorities' domination of regional politics. Only five relatively unimportant regions held such elections during 2012, and the Kremlin manipulated the voting to ensure victory for all of the incumbent governors, even those who had grown extremely unpopular. As in the past, municipal governments

had few sources of direct funding and had to rely on transfers from the federal and regional budgets, limiting their ability to function autonomously. *Russia's rating for local democratic governance remains unchanged at 6.00.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. Russia's judicial system remains heavily dependent on the Kremlin for guidance in political cases. In one of many examples of politicized prosecutions during 2012, members of the feminist performance group Pussy Riot were sentenced to two years in prison for attempting to record an antigovernment protest video in a church. International bodies continue to criticize harsh prison conditions in Russia, including the use of torture. *Russia's rating for judicial framework and independence remains unchanged at 6.00.*

Corruption. Graft and the abuse of public office for private gain continue to be definitive characteristics of the country's governance system. Putin serves as an arbiter among a small group of individuals who have used their connections to him to amass considerable wealth, particularly in the energy sector. Corruption at lower levels of government has imperiled the delivery of basic public services, such as residential heating in St. Petersburg. Those who attempt to uncover official corruption often face retaliation, and impunity for such actions is the norm. The authorities have made little progress in prosecuting the individuals responsible for the 2009 death in custody of lawyer Sergey Magnitskiy, who had exposed a graft scheme that netted \$230 million. *Russia's rating for corruption remains unchanged at 6.50.*

Outlook for 2013. With the next parliamentary and presidential elections not due until December 2016 and March 2018, respectively, Putin appears unlikely to face formal challenges to his rule in the foreseeable future. It is unclear whether the opposition will be able to rally the Russian public against him in the interim, particularly as continuing selective application of the repressive new laws will reduce popular participation in protests and other forms of civil disobedience. Preparations for the February 2014 Winter Olympics in the southern city of Sochi are likely to dominate the concerns of top policymakers in 2013, as the project will draw public attention to corruption among the numerous contractors building the new facilities and infrastructure as well as ongoing security threats and instability in the broader North Caucasus area.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
n/a	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

Having won the tightly controlled 4 March election, Vladimir Putin was inaugurated for a new six-year term as president on 7 May, after a violent police crackdown on protesters who had gathered in Moscow on the eve of the ceremony. However, he had remained the country's paramount leader even during his four-year stint as prime minister. Putin has served as either president or prime minister since 1999, and he will be eligible to run for another six-year term as president in 2018. It would be difficult for him to leave office due to the pervasive corruption and lawlessness infusing the system he leads. He must retain control in order to avoid repercussions for himself and his closest allies, many of whom have abused their positions to enrich themselves. Putin personally enjoys a lavish lifestyle, as his office gives him access to an outsized array of palaces, planes, yachts, and other trappings of wealth.¹ The turmoil and speculation surrounding his unexplained absence from public view for several weeks in October and November—including the cancellation of five foreign trips amid reports that he was suffering from a back injury—highlighted the opaque and personalized nature of the Russian political system, which currently depends on Putin to serve as arbiter among various informal elite factions and competing patronage networks.²

The parliament has little influence over the government's policies. According to a 2012 survey, some 72 percent of Russians feel that the parliament is either "fully" or "significantly" dependent on the executive branch in its decision making.³ Large majorities also believe that the executive branch controls the judiciary, the media, and the business sector. Although the ruling United Russia party's majority in the lower house, the State Duma, was significantly reduced by the December 2011 elections, the legislature remains a reliable partner for the Kremlin in enacting measures to further constrain the already weak opposition.⁴ A short-lived filibuster on 5 June, for example, failed to prevent the passage of punitive new fines on protesters. On 14 September, the Duma voted, 291 to 150, to expel Gennadiy Gudkov for allegedly combining business dealings with his official duties as a member of parliament.⁵ Gudkov had strongly criticized Putin's policies and accused several of his fellow lawmakers of illegal business dealings. His ouster marked the first time that a member of the Duma was expelled without first being convicted of a crime. The upper chamber, the Federation Council, which is supposed to provide representation to the regions, has instead become a collection of indirect Kremlin appointees and corporate representatives.⁶

After returning to the formal apex of this system, Putin quickly reversed the rhetorical shift toward modernization and political reform that Dmitriy Medvedev,

the placeholder president from 2008 to 2012, had cultivated but never put into practical effect.⁷ Opposition activists had mounted a series of large protests since the fraudulent parliamentary elections of December 2011, and Putin used his first months in office to enact measures aimed at deterring further demonstrations and intimidating any members of society who might mobilize to challenge his rule or threaten the regime's economic and political interests.⁸ In addition to the new fines for participants in unsanctioned rallies, he signed a rapid succession of laws that increased control over the internet, greatly expanded the definition of treason, recriminalized slander, and required nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that received foreign funding and engaged in vaguely defined "political activities" to take on the stigmatizing label of "foreign agent." These laws amounted to a fresh assault on freedoms of speech, assembly, and association and gave the authorities new tools to wield selectively against targeted groups or activists.

The protest movement faded over the course of the year, as opposition efforts seemed only to bring a harsher response by the authorities, and many citizens reverted to a sense of powerlessness.⁹ The overwhelming majority of Russians reportedly feel that they have no say in the political development of the country.¹⁰ Nevertheless, many observers argued during 2012 that Putin's refusal to leave the stage and his efforts to block all forms of change were driving Russia toward a political crisis.¹¹

Electoral Process

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.50	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

Despite growing discontent with the political status quo at the beginning of 2012, Putin was able to secure victory in the 4 March presidential election, officially winning 63.6 percent of the vote against a field of hand-chosen nominal challengers.¹² He benefited from preferential media treatment, the numerous advantages of incumbency, and procedural irregularities during the vote count.¹³ In 2008, Putin had installed Medvedev in the presidency and moved to the prime minister's office so that he could return four years later without violating the constitutional ban on more than two consecutive terms. However, this maneuver contradicted the spirit of the restriction, and the noncompetitive nature of the 2012 election undermined any legitimacy that the regime hoped to gain from the process.¹⁴

The election's flaws were numerous and obvious. The Central Election Commission disqualified veteran liberal politician Grigoriy Yavlinskiy as a candidate on the grounds that too many of the requisite signatures he collected were invalid. The Supreme Court upheld the decision.¹⁵ Putin did not participate in televised debates with the other candidates, instead sending surrogates to defend his policies. His press secretary said he did not have time for the encounters.¹⁶ In addition, there is strong statistical evidence of voter fraud. Official voter turnout was extremely high in several regions, with overwhelming majorities logged for Putin. In some

places, both turnout and support for Putin approached 100 percent, suggesting that votes for opposition candidates were removed.¹⁷ Typical forms of voter fraud in Russia include abuse of absentee balloting, “carousel voting” in which people are bused among polling stations to cast multiple votes, ballot stuffing, copycat political parties whose names are confusingly similar to the names of real parties, and spoiler candidates who aim to split the opposition vote or create the semblance of competition without ever endangering the chances of the favored candidate.¹⁸ Despite the prevalence of such practices, few if any suspects have been prosecuted for electoral violations in Russia. A large number of domestic observers were able to document these problems in the March 2012 vote, but they could do little to reduce the impact of the abuses on the outcome.

As part of a reform package adopted in the wake of mass protests over fraud in the December 2011 Duma elections, the authorities enacted new legislation that made it much easier for Russian citizens to set up and register political parties. The law, signed by President Medvedev on 2 April 2012, reduced the number of required members from 40,000 to 500.¹⁹ Before the law was adopted, Russia had only seven registered political parties. The relaxed rules allowed 42 more parties to register by mid-December 2012,²⁰ but none posed a significant challenge to the authorities, and the reform seemed designed mainly to encourage fragmentation of the opposition. The new law could make it even more difficult for democratic activists to unite in one organization that would be able to cross the 5 percent vote threshold—lowered from the previous 7 percent—required to win representation in the next Duma, especially if the ban on forming electoral blocs remains in place.²¹

In October, Putin signed a new law that combined the existing two annual days for regional elections—in March and October—into one day each year, the second Sunday in September. The only exception will occur every five years, when there are Duma elections; in those years, Duma and regional elections will be combined and held on a single day in December.²² The opposition complained that the new September election day would make it difficult for them to gain voter attention, as the campaign period would coincide with summer vacations. The main beneficiary would be the ruling party, whose superior resources would ensure that its supporters turn out to vote.

New laws that came into effect at the end of the year required all members of the Federation Council who are appointed by a regional legislature to be members of that regional body; the previous rules allowed members of local-level legislatures as well. Governors and their nominees to the Federation Council will be elected together.²³ In his 12 December address to the parliament, Putin announced plans to replace the party-list voting system for the 2016 Duma elections with one that elected half of the members from party lists and half from single-member districts.²⁴ The proposal appeared to be motivated by the declining popularity of the ruling United Russia party, which would otherwise be unlikely to win a majority in the next parliament. Single-member districts could allow administrative resources to be used more effectively on behalf of progovernment candidates, who would also benefit from divisions in the opposition under a first-past-the-post voting system.

Civil Society

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50

As in the previous two years, civil society in Russia continued to play a more active role in public life in 2012, but it met with increased repression following Putin's return to the Kremlin. Street protests continued throughout the year, though their size dropped in the months after the presidential inauguration. In an effort to maintain its momentum and focus growing dissatisfaction with the regime, the Russian opposition movement held online elections on 21–22 October for a 45-member Coordinating Council.²⁵ Internet voters chose anticorruption blogger Aleksey Navalny, who was facing three criminal investigations by year's end, as the council's chairman. The new body will decide which candidates the opposition will back in upcoming elections and where and when to hold protest activities.²⁶

Dozens of young activists have won elections at the municipal level, where they advocate for small changes. One example is Maksim Kaz, 27, a member of the Coordinating Council who in March 2012 won a seat on the district council of Shchukino in Moscow, where he has supported the introduction of bike paths.²⁷ Another is Irina Oleynikova, who was elected mayor of Kuleshovka, a town with a population of 14,000, after leading a local protest movement to halt the destruction of a popular forest. Such grassroots efforts are considered an effective way to challenge Kremlin authority from below over the long term.

After flooding killed more than 170 people and devastated much of the southern city of Krymsk in July, ordinary citizens from across the country quickly organized an effort to send aid to the affected region. Russian commentators pointed to these activities as evidence of a growing confidence that citizens can take action without the involvement of the state.²⁸ Similar efforts had been mounted in response to destructive wildfires that had spread across Russia in previous years.

However, over the course of 2012, the government dramatically escalated its efforts to stamp out independent civic activities, particularly those that touch on political issues.²⁹ On 6 May, the eve of Putin's inauguration, the police used force to break up a protest rally in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square. At least 18 participants faced criminal charges during the year, and the one defendant tried and convicted by year's end received four and a half years in prison in November, after he admitted to attacking the police. In an effort to prevent such events from happening in the future, a new law officially published on 9 June increased the fines for participating in unsanctioned rallies by 150 times, from a maximum of 2,000 rubles (\$64) to 300,000 rubles (\$9,600) for individuals and 1 million rubles (\$32,000) for legal entities.³⁰ According to the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, the law violates a number of European standards, for example by allowing the authorities to change the location of a rally on arbitrary grounds.³¹

The government also stepped up its restrictions on NGOs that receive foreign funding. A law passed in July required all such groups that take part in vaguely defined "political activities" to register as "foreign agents" with the Justice Ministry.³²

Political activity, according to the law, consists of seeking to change state policy and influencing public opinion with that aim. The Agora Association has filed suit against the Justice Ministry to obtain more specific definitions of the law's clauses and reduce the uncertainty faced by the NGO community.³³ The legislation allows the authorities to suspend the activities of noncompliant groups for up to six months and levy substantial fines. Its ultimate impact will depend on how it is implemented and to what degree the authorities intend to intimidate civil society. By the end of the year, only one organization had registered as a "foreign agent"—Shchit i Mech (Shield and Sword), a Chuvashiya-based human rights organization.³⁴

In December, the government enacted a law that allows the suspension of NGOs and freezing of their assets if they engage in "political activities" and are headed by a U.S. citizen or accept money from U.S. sponsors. Lyudmila Alekseyeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, is a U.S. citizen, and many observers assumed that the law was partly aimed at her.³⁵ The measure also barred Americans from adopting Russian orphans in retaliation for the so-called Magnitskiy Act, a new U.S. law allowing visa bans and asset freezes for Russian officials who engage in human rights abuses.

A law that expanded the definition of treason went into effect on 14 November. Proposed by the Federal Security Service (FSB), the measure was apparently aimed at deterring substantive contact between Russian citizens and foreigners.³⁶ According to the new definition in Article 275 of the criminal code, high treason includes the provision of "financial, technical, consultative, or other assistance" to foreign states or organizations for "activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation." Critics said the vague wording could criminalize the ordinary activities of human rights activists, journalists, and businesspeople. It also gives the FSB expanded powers to monitor such activities.³⁷ FSB deputy director Yuriy Gorbunov reportedly explained that the legislation was specifically aimed at Russian NGOs, which he claimed were engaged in espionage.³⁸ In the first case under the new law, the authorities charged activist Ivan Moseyev with treason and inciting interethnic hatred for potentially destabilizing the far northern region of Arkhangelsk through his advocacy of Pomor ethnic identity, which entails associations with northern Norway.³⁹ The charges amount to a claim that Moseyev was using support from the Norwegian special services to promote ethnic separatism in the high north. All of these new laws build on previous legislative efforts to quash "extremism," another vaguely defined term that is applied arbitrarily to the government's perceived enemies.

The authorities have taken several other steps to end direct foreign assistance to Russian civil society. They requested that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) end its activities in the country by 1 October. USAID had funded about 60 Russian organizations, including Memorial, which works to preserve the memory of Soviet-era repression and fight ongoing rights abuses in the North Caucasus, and Golos, an election-monitoring organization.⁴⁰ The government also asked the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to wind down its operations in Russia by 31 December.

Other groups have also run afoul of the authorities for various reasons. In November, the Justice Ministry shut down the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), which apparently drew official ire through its objections to the hostile takeover of a jade mining project in Buryatiya by a company led by the head of the local FSB branch.⁴¹ The decision had international implications, since RAIPON formally represents the interests of minority peoples at the eight-nation Arctic Council and is widely respected. Separately, Human Rights Watch senior researcher Tanya Lokshina received detailed threats via text messages on 28–30 September. The messages included information that could only have been gleaned from surveillance of her activities and likely involved the security agencies.⁴² In addition, nine Russian regions, including the city of St. Petersburg, passed laws banning “homosexual propaganda,”⁴³ meaning activists can be arrested if they do anything to promote the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people.

Russian tax laws do not encourage private philanthropy, and there are no significant Russian charitable foundations. State money generally does not flow to groups engaged in human rights work.⁴⁴ Most independent Russian NGOs rely on foreign funding because no alternative resources are available in Russia. However, Navalnyy and Olga Romanova—a prominent business journalist and opposition leader who started Russia Behind Bars, a group with 60,000 members dedicated to defending wrongly accused businessmen—have demonstrated that it is possible to convince Russian citizens to contribute money to causes they deem worthy. Some NGOs like the Moscow Helsinki Group have been able to raise more funds from domestic sources, including business magnates like Mikhail Prokhorov, who contributed 1 million rubles (\$32,000) to the organization in 2012. The group also received a presidential grant of 4 million rubles to monitor the human rights implications of the implementation of new laws.⁴⁵

Independent Media

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

Putin’s return to the Kremlin was accompanied by increased pressure on independent media and online news sources. After the 6–9 May street demonstrations in Moscow surrounding the inauguration, OSCE media representative Dunja Mijatović complained about the “indiscriminate detention of journalists” who covered the events and “recent cyber attacks on Russian media websites.”⁴⁶ She cited reports that the police had harassed and detained dozens of reporters. The OSCE also pointed out that the websites of *Kommersant*, *Ekho Moskvyy*, *Bolshoy Gorod*, the online television station *Dozhd*, and the *Slon.ru* news portal were rendered temporarily unavailable on 6 May by distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. The outlets had planned to report live from the demonstrations. In a further effort to weaken independent media, Putin signed a new law in July that recriminalized

defamation.⁴⁷ Medvedev had just decriminalized the offense in late 2011. Fines in the new law were raised to a maximum of 5 million rubles (\$160,000), but there is no threat of a prison term.

The authorities also used their control over Russia's main television networks to discredit the opposition. The state-controlled network NTV, for example, broadcast smears in the form of a documentary series entitled "Anatomy of a Protest."⁴⁸ The first episode, aired in the middle of March, alleged that protest organizers had to pay participants to take part in rallies that called for free and fair elections and sought Putin's resignation. The broadcast brought several hundred protesters to the Ostankino television tower in Moscow, and more than 100 were arrested, including opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Sergey Udaltsov. "Anatomy of a Protest 2," aired on 5 October, claimed that Udaltsov and his colleagues Konstantin Lebedev and Leonid Razvozhayev had conspired with Georgian lawmaker Givi Targamadze to plot terrorist attacks in Russia.⁴⁹ On 17 October the authorities charged Udaltsov with preparing mass riots in Moscow in connection with the 6 May protests, citing evidence from the television program. Lebedev was already under arrest, and Razvozhayev was apparently kidnapped in Ukraine on 10 October, brought back to Russia, tortured, and forced to sign a confession.⁵⁰ The authorities have refused to launch an investigation into his claims of torture.⁵¹ Razvozhayev had been meeting in Ukraine with representatives of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in an effort to win asylum in a third country.

In the face of such obvious propaganda, the proportion of Russians who get their information from state-controlled television sources fell to 73 percent in February 2012, from 87 percent a year earlier.⁵² In contrast, the number of internet users grew in the last year from 52 to 57 percent of the population.⁵³ Moreover, as much as 25 percent of the population uses the internet to follow the latest news. The Yandex news aggregator had a total of 19.1 million daily visitors in April, while the number of viewers of state-controlled Channel One—the country's leading television channel by viewers—reached 18.2 million, according to estimates by TNS Russia, which surveyed people between the ages of 12 and 54 in cities with a population of more than 100,000.⁵⁴ However, people spent an average of 63 minutes per day watching Channel One that month, compared with only 10 minutes per day on Yandex.

Given its growing importance, the internet has drawn more attention from the government. A new law that took effect on 1 November gave the state an additional mechanism to censor the web and ordered Roskomnadzor, the telecommunications regulator, to create a blacklist of banned sites.⁵⁵ While the measure ostensibly targets content that is harmful to children, such as child pornography and websites that encourage suicide and drug use, critics raised objections to the legislation's vague wording and the fact that it allowed websites to be shut down without a court order. More than 180 sites were shuttered soon after the law came into force, including a satirical encyclopedia and an electronic library on the grounds that they carried material about marijuana and suicide. The list of banned sites is not publicly available, but a government portal allows users to check if specific sites are included

and to suggest the proscription of other sites.⁵⁶ In addition, the technology required to implement the law, deep-packet inspection, will greatly increase the ability of the authorities to monitor content transmitted across the internet.⁵⁷

Several sources of independent news continue to function. These include *New Times*, *Novaya Gazeta*, Ekho Moskvy, and Dozhd, along with the business newspapers *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*. Since the massive December 2011 protests, state-controlled television has begun to acknowledge opposition rallies, an improvement over past years in which the opposition was virtually ignored. On 15 September, television stations even showed Navalny, one of the most effective opposition leaders, who had generally been kept off the airwaves. Channel One quoted him out of context, but his statement broadcast on NTV was coherent, according to the account in *Kommersant*.⁵⁸ Ekho Moskvy and other radio stations provide live coverage of opposition rallies, and their commentators present a variety of views.

However, these outlets regularly face harassment, and impunity for past assaults and murders of journalists is the norm. *Novaya Gazeta* editor Dmitriy Muratov claimed that Aleksandr Bastrykin, the chairman of the powerful Investigative Committee, had abducted deputy editor Sergey Sokolov in June, had him driven to a forest, and directly threatened him with violence in response to a critical article.⁵⁹ Bastrykin subsequently issued a partial apology for his “emotional outburst,”⁶⁰ apparently under pressure from Putin, though observers suggested that the president was likely concerned more about the form than the spirit of the incident.⁶¹ On 29 March, the board of directors of Ekho Moskvy terminated the positions of four independent directors—editor in chief Aleksey Venediktov, first deputy editor in chief Vladimir Varfolomeyev, Yevgeniy Yasin, and Aleksandr Makovskiy. The first two retained their editorial positions, but their removal as directors left no journalists on the board, which will make it easier to fire the editors, according to Varfolomeyev.⁶² Separately, the authorities have filed charges of hooliganism motivated by political, ideological, racial, ethnic, or religious hatred or enmity against Aleksandr Lebedev, a banking magnate who is the main funder behind *Novaya Gazeta*. The charges resulted from an incident in which Lebedev punched former real estate mogul Sergey Polonskiy on a 16 September 2011 NTV talk show.⁶³

The new law that forced NGOs with foreign funding to adopt the label of “foreign agent” also banned radio stations with more than 48 percent foreign ownership. The legislation forced U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to discontinue its AM broadcasts, and the management controversially fired many of its Russian journalists as it restructured the organization to focus more on the internet.

At the end of April, just before leaving the presidency, Medvedev signed a decree establishing a new public-service television station that was scheduled to begin broadcasting on 1 January 2013.⁶⁴ Putin appointed the respected journalist Anatoliy Lysenko as its director general in July. The programming will be broadcast on the Defense Ministry’s Zvezda network. Critics pointed out that the Kremlin will retain de facto control over editorial policy, meaning the new station is likely to become another progovernment outlet rather than a Russian version of the

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Funding is to come from a foundation established by the federal government.⁶⁵

Local Democratic Governance

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00

At the end of 2011, as a concession to the demonstrators protesting fraud in the State Duma elections, Medvedev announced that Russia was returning to a system of elected regional governors; Putin replaced such elections with presidential appointments in 2004. However, between the announcement and the implementation of the new law on 1 June, the president appointed 22 governors to delay the need for elections in those regions as long as possible.⁶⁶ The regions in question were typically important locations where United Russia had performed poorly in the Duma elections.

On 14 October 2012, the authorities allowed five relatively minor regions to hold gubernatorial elections: Amur, Belgorod, Bryansk, Novgorod, and Ryazan. Thanks to the extensive use of administrative resources, mobilization of employees of state companies, and early voting schemes, all five incumbents were able to win new terms, even in Ryazan and Bryansk, where the sitting governors were unpopular.⁶⁷ Most candidates had difficulty registering because they had to pass through “municipal filters,” a feature of the law that required each candidate to obtain the signatures of between 5 and 10 percent (each region sets its own threshold) of the elected officials in three-quarters of rural and urban districts to get on the ballot, effectively allowing the incumbent authorities to manipulate who entered the race.⁶⁸ One leaked document from the office of the Novgorod governor showed that he planned to win by allowing only two other candidates to compete—one from the “spoiler party” Patriots of Russia and one from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s populist but typically obedient Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).⁶⁹ According to Novgorod officials, the Kremlin had rejected the governor’s idea of allowing a more open race that would have granted him more legitimacy after he won.⁷⁰

In addition to the formal “municipal filter,” there was also a de facto presidential filter, as the Kremlin proved able to block candidates that it did not support. In Ryazan, candidate Igor Morozov, who likely would have defeated the sitting governor, withdrew from the race after being summoned to the Kremlin for consultations and then appointed to the Federation Council.⁷¹ By the end of the year, the Constitutional Court had ruled that the new system did not violate the constitution.⁷²

In local elections held in March, the opposition had scored a few symbolic victories, for example by winning up to 30 percent of the seats in Moscow’s neighborhood councils and electing the opposition-minded Sergey Andreyev as mayor of Togliatti in a protest vote. In April, Yevgeniy Urlashov, with the support

of a broad opposition coalition, won the mayoralty of Yaroslavl.⁷³ However, opposition candidate Oleg Shein lost the 4 March mayoral election in Astrakhan. Alleging that the vote was rigged, he mounted a 40-day hunger strike that drew considerable media attention, but failed to force a rerun. He was later fined for holding an unsanctioned protest.

Municipal governments face a number of budget problems that make it difficult for them to implement independent policies. Many expenses, such as teacher and police salaries, are set at the federal level. When federal politicians raise compensation for public employees, local governments are often forced to find the funds necessary to cover the increases. In addition, local governments are dependent on regional budgets for 70 percent of their revenue, and this source of income is not stable.⁷⁴ Municipal governments lack the tax base to support their own spending; only 5 percent of their revenue comes from local taxes. Large cities are typically obliged to share their funds with smaller towns, weakening their ability to invest in their own development.

In 2012, the federal government took some steps to reduce the enormous advantages that the city of Moscow enjoys over other parts of the country. New legislation that took effect in January forced companies to pay taxes based on their economic activity rather than the location of their headquarters. The ultimate effect will be to shift tax payments from Moscow to other regions. However, the Duma passed legislation in April that slows the full implementation of the law until 2016.⁷⁵

Putin's efforts to quell persistent violence in the North Caucasus area have met with little success. During the first eight months of 2012, some 500 people were killed in the North Caucasus, including both security officials and insurgents.⁷⁶ The government's central policy is to spend large sums on economic development in an effort to undermine the appeal of the Islamist militants. However, plans for such extensive federal spending have angered ethnic Russians, who resent the diversion of resources to the area, particularly when it is used for seemingly ill-conceived projects like ski resorts.⁷⁷ The policy is also hampered by pervasive corruption, and does little to address abuses by the security forces, which help fuel the insurgency.

Judicial Framework and Independence

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
4.75	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	5.50	5.50

Russia's judicial system remains heavily dependent on the political authorities. The country holds approximately 60 political prisoners, and predatory schemes to seize property through manipulation of the legal system have left thousands of victimized businessmen behind bars.

Several prominent cases in 2012 highlighted the degree to which judges appear to follow political directives. In the widely reported Pussy Riot case, in which the group attempted to perform and record a "punk prayer" calling on the Virgin Mary to remove Putin from office in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral

on 21 February,⁷⁸ critics such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) argued that the prison sentences given to two of the women were excessively harsh.⁷⁹ Mariya Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova received two-year terms after being convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred. A third member of the group, Yekaterina Samutsevich, was released with a suspended sentence in October.

The PACE also criticized the eight-year prison sentence given to Taisiya Osipova, the wife of an activist with the opposition umbrella group Other Russia. She was imprisoned for selling illegal drugs, which she says were planted on her. A previous conviction had been overturned by a higher court.⁸⁰ Similar international criticism was leveled at the criminal investigations targeting opposition leaders like Navalniy, Udaltsov, and Nemtsov.⁸¹ Even as such cases proliferate, the authorities have failed to conduct adequate investigations into the deaths of human rights and anticorruption activists such as Anna Politkovskaya (2006), Natalya Estemirova (2009), and Sergey Magnitskiy (2009).

The criminal justice system often appears to protect members of the ruling elite from the consequences of their misdeeds. In October, television host Vladimir Pozner raised the question of why Anna Shavenkova, the daughter of a high-ranking official in Irkutsk who ran over two women, killing one and maiming the other, received a suspended sentence because she has a small child, while the Pussy Riot performers, who also have small children but no high-ranking relatives, must serve two-year sentences.⁸²

The business arbitration courts are growing more professional, and businesses increasingly turn to them to solve disputes, though many large firms continue to rely on foreign courts if they have the resources to access them.⁸³

Prison conditions in Russia are often deplorable. On 23 November, the UN Committee against Torture complained of “numerous and consistent reports” of threats, reprisals, and deaths suffered by human rights defenders and journalists in Russia.⁸⁴ The body pointed to increased allegations of abuse and many reports documenting torture. The March death of 52-year-old Sergey Nazarov after being tortured while in police custody in Kazan drew international attention to the problem, but it was far from the only case. Some analysts argue that the new definition of treason in the criminal code could prevent Russians from sharing information on torture and other abuses with UN human rights bodies.

Corruption

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

Corruption remains the defining feature of the Russian political system. Sergey Stepashin, chairman of the Audit Chamber, claimed in November 2012 that \$30 billion is embezzled from state procurements each year.⁸⁵ A small group of

individuals around Putin effectively compete among themselves for control of Russia's key energy and financial resources. The group includes Igor Sechin, security services coordinator and head of the state oil company Rosneft; Sergey Chemezov, chief executive of the state-owned industrial conglomerate Russian Technologies (Rostec) State Corporation; Gennadiy Timchenko, owner of the energy trading firm Gunvor; Yuriy Kovalchuk, owner of Rossiya Bank; appointed Moscow mayor and former Kremlin chief of staff Sergey Sobyenin; current Kremlin chief of staff and former defense minister Sergey Ivanov; first deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration Vyacheslav Volodin; and Prime Minister Dmitriy Medvedev.⁸⁶ Putin is the arbiter in this system, and his word is decisive among the rival factions.

Much of the wealth of these men is tied to their personal connections with Putin. Kovalchuk turned his small St. Petersburg bank into a major business partner of the state-owned energy giant Gazprom. Timchenko's company Gunvor handles more than \$70 billion in oil sales, mostly through its dealings with Rosneft.⁸⁷

Money apparently moves freely between Kremlin-friendly businessmen and high-ranking government officials. First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov attracted considerable unwanted attention in early 2012 when Navalny published documents on his web site that showed a transfer of \$50 million from billionaire business magnate Roman Abramovich to a British Virgin Islands trust held by Shuvalov's wife in 2004. The money was supposedly for legal work Shuvalov had done before entering government in 1997.⁸⁸ One way that the Russian press and internet users track corruption among officials is by pointing out the value of their wristwatches, which often exceeds their reported annual salaries.⁸⁹

Although the leadership frequently denounces widespread corruption, such rhetoric typically does not produce a consistent or substantive response in practice. However, an effort launched in the fall of 2012 was different from previous anticorruption campaigns in terms of its scale and reach, extending to almost all elite clans. It serves to intimidate the factions, suppress destabilizing divisions that would weaken the regime, force all established groups to share spoils with new elites like police generals, increase regime efficiency, and push out the most scandalous individuals who make easy targets for the opposition.

In November, Putin fired Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov amid allegations of fraud in the Defense Ministry, though no criminal charges were immediately filed against him. The ministry-controlled corporation Oboronservis was accused of selling \$95 million worth of property at below-market prices. In December, Putin ordered state-owned companies and banks to publicly disclose how much they pay their top officers, while proposed legislation would require officials to repatriate foreign assets.⁹⁰ As in past campaigns, the top leaders have avoided prosecution, though some lower-level officials face charges.

Large-scale corruption in Russia is fueled primarily by the country's oil and gas wealth. One of the key indicators of graft in the country is the performance of Gazprom, which has been an object of Putin's personal attention since he became president. Financial analysts believe that in 2011, Gazprom wasted up to \$35

billion in inefficient capital investments. Its low stock price reflects the market's concern about the high level of corruption in the company.⁹¹

Another key source of corruption is state-mandated megaprojects surrounding international events. Construction associated with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok in September 2012 cost \$22 billion, with considerable sums siphoned off as graft. Similarly, Russia at year end was planning to spend more than \$30 billion on preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics in the southern resort town of Sochi. The projected costs have risen dramatically from the approximately \$12 billion listed in the original bid in 2007 and further escalation is expected.

Corruption has a catastrophic impact on municipal governance. In November 2012, the authorities arrested a group of officials who had allegedly stolen more than 3 billion rubles (\$100 million) from the St. Petersburg municipal services system by claiming to procure high-quality pipes, but instead purchasing cheaper products and pocketing the difference. Repairs were carried out by companies under the bureaucrats' control for artificially inflated prices.⁹² The scheme led to the installation of more than 600 kilometers of substandard central heating pipes.

Watchdogs who expose corruption often face retribution by the authorities. In the case of Sergey Magnitskiy, a lawyer working for Hermitage Capital who accused officials of stealing \$230 million and subsequently died in prison of an untreated illness in 2009, a court in December 2012 acquitted Dmitriy Kratov, the former deputy head of Butyrka prison and the only person tried in the case to date. The judge cited a lack of evidence that Kratov's negligence led to Magnitskiy's death.⁹³ Magnitskiy's mother testified in court that she had asked Kratov to provide medical care for her son, but he refused.⁹⁴

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