

Russia

by Pavel Luzin

Capital: Moscow
Population: 144.1 million
GNI/capita, PPP: US\$23,770

Source: World Bank *World Development Indicators*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
National Democratic Governance	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75
Electoral Process	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Civil Society	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50
Independent Media	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50
Local Democratic Governance	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.50
Corruption	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Democracy Score	5.96	6.11	6.14	6.18	6.18	6.21	6.29	6.46	6.50	6.57

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. If consensus cannot be reached, Freedom House is responsible for the final ratings. 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. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, the Russian political regime continued to focus on ensuring the loyalty of the ruling class and the survival of its system of governance. The regime sought to perfect its authoritarian control over Russian citizens and the economy in order to prevent any real democratic changes. As in previous years, the trajectory is the entrenchment of a long-term dictatorship.

Despite its efforts, however, the regime still was not able to form a unified and cohesive political line. The main causes for this are the dynamic balance of powers between different groups (or clans) of economic, political, bureaucratic, and criminal interests, the regime's flexibility based on informal relations and practices, and the character of the globalized Russian elite. The result is a contradictory course in which the regime pursues constraints on individual freedoms and the market economy while at the same time is unable to formulate any sustainable rules for political elites, businesses, or Russian citizens.

During 2016, the Russian political regime sought first and foremost to shore up its core components—the secret services, police, and customs apparatuses, as well as the presidential administration—through reorganization and reshuffling of institutions and personnel. The main cause for these processes is the domestic uncertainty due to the economic crisis of the last three years and the deadlock of the Russian post-Soviet model of political economy. The direction in Russian foreign policy initiated with the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 has added additional uncertainty as to the stability of the system of governance.

The Kremlin's focus on the secret services and police is an effort to protect the regime's power from domestic challenges, and to consolidate the elite and society around a confrontation with the West. In parallel to these internal regime developments, the general election campaign dominated Russia's political scene in 2016. This was the first Russian parliamentary election where the residents of occupied Crimea (almost 2 million people) also voted. This fact created a political aberration with unpredictable foreign and domestic consequences in which Russia's parliament now lacks international legitimacy.

While the election was predictable enough (there were no doubts the ruling United Russia party would keep its majority), it also presented challenges for the Kremlin. The main problem was the return to the electoral system prior to 2007 in which half of the 450 Duma members are elected proportionally in a national vote, and the other half are elected from 225 single-seat districts. The system was changed back because the Kremlin decided to share responsibility with regional elites in the face of long-term economic decline and the ineffectiveness of the political and economic model. The problem, however, is that these 225 single-seat members are now connected with their districts through close relations with regional elites, patron-client relations, business interests, and lobbyists, and less connected with the United Russia party's leadership. While United Russia has the largest majority it has ever had in the Duma, it may have less control over its single-seat deputies.

In the face of the economic crisis, regional elites used the election to improve their political positions vis-à-vis the Kremlin, as demonstrated by the high level of falsification at the local level during the elections. After the elections, the regime must strive to balance these different interests in an ever-more complicated system, retaining the current distribution of political power and economic assets while avoiding democratization and liberalization.

The government continued its offensive against independent NGOs and civic activists in 2016. New amendments to the law on NGOs designate virtually all activities (even in the medical sphere) as political activity, opening even more opportunities for repression. For their part, NGOs continued to try to adapt their activities to an authoritarian environment that does not have clear rules. An increasing amount of their time and resources goes to avoiding the label of "foreign agents," which leaves NGOs with little agenda aside from surviving. However, if and when the civil society develops crowdfunding and volunteerism as its tools, it will be able to create a challenge for the authoritarian system. The main interest of the Kremlin in this sphere is to prevent the development of civic trust and solidarity.

Civic protests in 2016 were based mostly on the economic interests of different local professional groups, such as truck drivers and farmers. There are still no common values that may spread beyond the limits of these groups and consolidate them against the authoritarian system.

Like the NGO sector, the independent media's goals have also narrowed to survival. The declining economic situation means that media that are reliant on advertising and/or paid content have come under increasing strain. At the same time, independent media still face constant legal, political, and economic pressure from the authorities and the Kremlin. Independent media trendsetters have become weaker and are unable to expand their audience. This leads to a paradoxical situation in which regional independent media, like Fontanka.ru in St. Petersburg and Znak.com in Yekaterinburg, have become increasingly important. But even these local trendsetters must balance between the interests of the Kremlin and those of regional elites. The result is a highly fragmented and weakened Russian media landscape.

At the local governance level, the main trend is the growing struggle between local political and economic clans and other actors. The main driver in this struggle is the economic crisis, which has resulted in a battle over a decreasing number of assets among a greater number of political actors. In these circumstances, the number of arrested regional and local officials and businessmen continues to grow. The Kremlin has tried to gain control of the situation by assigning officials with experience in the government or in the Federal Protection Service (FSO) to act as governors of a number of regions. Neither the Kremlin nor regional and local elites are interested in the democratization of local governance.

The judicial system continues to be weak and fragmented. The regime's assault on any type of separation of powers and limits set out by the Constitution of Russia have made the country's judicial framework even weaker. The political interests of the Kremlin, and even the interests of other influential actors, are dominant. For example, the behavior of the head of the Republic of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, has become a sharp symbol of the judicial system's deterioration.

The vast evidence of corruption in Russia uncovered in 2016 finally showed that there are no borders between the authorities and organized crime. The "mafia state" or "criminal state" is no longer a metaphor. Journalistic and activist investigations in 2016 demonstrated the involvement of Putin's inner circle in offshoring billions of dollars of wealth and acquiring homes and jets worth tens of millions of dollars, and leaks from Spanish police connected a deputy head of the Central Bank and former senator to the Taganskaya crime syndicate from Moscow. None of these revelations carried legal consequences. In this light, the high-profile arrest of Minister of Economic Development Alexey Ulyukayev appears as no more than a tool in the struggle among corrupted officials and institutions.

Score Changes:

- **Civil Society rating declined from 6.25 to 6.50** due to the continuing offensive of the government against NGOs, manifested in the widening number of activities covered by the "foreign agents" framework, the first criminal conviction of an activist under the "foreign agents" law, and the continued emigration of large numbers of activists from the country.
- **Judicial Framework and Independence rating declined from 6.25 to 6.50** due to the Constitutional Court's determination that rulings of the European Court of Human Rights could be ignored by Russia, the continued increase in political prisoners in the country, and evidence of the Chechen leadership's direct control over the courts in Chechnya.

As a result, Russia's Democracy Score declined from 6.50 to 6.57.

Outlook for 2017: The Russian regime's model of political economy will continue its struggle for survival both at home and abroad in 2017. With the authorities trying to prevent democratic changes in a turbulent environment, this may mean an increase in the level of repression and even violence against

civil society and independent political and media actors. As the country looks ahead to the 2018 presidential elections, the key issues for 2017 are diverging interests between the Kremlin and the regions (especially the most developed ones) in terms of distribution of responsibilities, budgetary policy, and parliamentary activity; the continuing struggle between different parts of the ruling class, including concerning succession; and the balance of power among different economic lobbies within the regime.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75

- Russia's government in 2016 was preoccupied with managing the challenges of retaining power amidst a long-term economic decline and the short-term priority of the electoral cycle of 2016–18. The main efforts were directed firstly at maintaining and transforming Russia's national security, defense, and law-enforcement bodies, and secondly at adapting key parts of the administration to the new circumstances. With major institutional and leadership changes, and a high-profile arrest near the end of the year, the struggle within the Russian political elite seemed to be escalating.
- There were major reshuffles in the leadership and institutional structure of the Russian special services during 2016. Old friends of President Vladimir Putin were replaced by loyalists whose careers depend solely on Putin and his regime. Two main processes may be identified here: 1) the growing struggle between the special services in the absence of transparency and parliamentary control, and 2) the Kremlin's attempts to maintain its control over the services and, through them, over Russian society.
- In April, there was a dramatic overhaul of the institutional structure of Russia's police. Police special forces (OMON) and internal troops (*vnutrennie voiska*) were removed from the purview of the Ministry of Interior and placed under a newly created National Guard commanded by the head of Putin's personal security service until 2014, Viktor Zolotov.¹² This new internal army could contain as many as 400,000 personnel³ and is intended both to quell rebellions inside Russia and to counter terrorist activity abroad. The Federal Migration Service (FMS) and Federal Service for Control of Drugs (FSKN) were merged into the Ministry of Interior.⁴
- The formation of the National Guard change was only the beginning of the shuffles. At the end of May, Putin replaced the head of the Federal Protection Service (FSO), which protects the country's government, provides political security to the regime, and also conducts counterintelligence activity.⁵ The outgoing chief, Evgeny Murov, was one of Putin's long-standing and powerful confidants; he was replaced after 16 years in office by Dmitriy Kochnev, who led the president's personal security in 2014–16. There were several possible reasons for this change: Murov had turned 70 and exceeded the age limit for his position; he also had close relations with businessman Dmitriy Mikhhalchenko, who was charged with alcohol smuggling in March.⁶ At the same time, Kochnev's wife, Marina Medvedeva, is a member of the executive board of Sibur chemical holding, which is owned by Putin's allies Leonid Mikhelson, Gennady Timchenko, and the man believed to be his son-in-law, Kirill Shamalov.⁷ This connection likely strengthens Kochnev's loyalty.
- There were also leadership changes within the Federal Security Service (FSB), the main successor to the KGB. The most probable reasons for these changes were the Kremlin's efforts to consolidate its control over society through the FSB,⁸ to improve the management of the FSB in the face of its huge structure and many competing internal interests, and competition among key players within the Kremlin itself. Due to charges of corruption against his deputies, Yuriy Yakovlev, chief of the FSB's Economic Security Service (SEB), was forced into retirement in June 2016,⁹ and General Sergey Korolev became the new head of the SEB on 8 July.¹⁰ Korolev previously headed the FSB's Department of Internal Security (USB), where he investigated corruption within the SEB as well as other lurid criminal cases against Russian governors, Ministry of Interior generals, the Investigative Committee, and more.¹¹ Some observers said

General Korolev and his team are close to Igor Sechin, head of the state-owned oil company Rosneft and one of Putin's closest friends and long-term political allies.¹² Outgoing SEB head Yakovlev was not punished for corruption, however, but instead joined the leadership of the state-owned nuclear energy company Rosatom in October.¹³

- The leadership of the Federal Customs Service (FTS), which collected in 2016 37 percent of the Russian federal budget's revenue,¹⁴ also changed due to the Kremlin's efforts to improve its manageability and competition for rent seeking opportunities. In January, the FTS was subordinated to the Ministry of Finance.¹⁵ In July, Putin's confidant Andrey Belyaninov, who had led the FTS for 10 years, became a witness in an investigation into illegal contraband (also in connection with Dmitriy Mikhalchenko's case)¹⁶ and was fired.¹⁷ The new head of the FTS, Vladimir Bulavin, previously served in the FSB and was the presidential representative in the Northwestern Federal District.¹⁸
- The Presidential Administration (PA), one of the core institutions of the regime, was reshuffled in 2016 as well. In August, Sergey Ivanov, the Chief of Staff of the PA since 2012 and a long-standing member of Putin's inner circle, became the special presidential representative for ecology and transportation. The new Chief of Staff, Anton Vaino, was previously Ivanov's deputy and has made his entire bureaucratic career under Putin's rule.¹⁹ Vaino's father is the vice president for external relations of AvtoVAZ, an automobile company owned by Renault, Nissan, and the Russian state corporation Rostec. Vaino's grandfather was head of the Estonian Communist Party from 1978 to 1988.²⁰
- Also in August, Minister of Education Dmitry Livanov was replaced by Olga Vasilyeva, who previously served in the PA and is known for her close relations with the Russian Orthodox Church.²¹ Livanov became a special envoy of the president on trade and economic connections with Ukraine.²²
- In October, Sergey Kirienko, the prime minister in 1998 and CEO of Rosatom from 2006 to 2016, became the First Deputy Chief of Staff in the PA, responsible for domestic politics.²³ He replaced Vyacheslav Volodin, who became the speaker of the Duma after the parliamentary elections in September.²⁴ Political experts stated that the main purpose of appointing Kirienko, once known as a "liberal" but now better regarded as an efficient manager, is to make domestic policy "compact and automatic,"²⁵ particularly by ensuring that the 2018 presidential elections come off without a hitch. Even in his new post, Kirienko retained his connections with Rosatom and became the Chairman of its Supervisory Board.²⁶ He replaced Boris Gryzlov, chief of the Ministry of Interior in 2001–03 and speaker of the Duma from 2003 to 2011, who became head of the state-owned Tactical Missiles Corporation JSC.²⁷
- Finally, the end of this year of shuffles was marked by a dramatic and high-profile arrest. In November, Minister of Economic Development Alexey Ulyukayev was arrested by the FSB and Investigative Committee and charged with corruption.²⁸ Ulyukayev's case appears to be related to an alleged bribe to facilitate the purchase in October of a majority of the Bashneft oil company by the state-owned Rosneft oil company, headed by the powerful insider Igor Sechin, which de facto initiated the case.²⁹ The planned privatization of a 19.5 percent stake in Rosneft was also cited as another factor in the arrest.³⁰ As Minister of Economic Development, Ulyukayev had oversight for the blocks of stocks owned by the Russian government. There was also evidence that the FSB is investigating not only Ulyukayev but also Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich, presidential adviser and former minister of economic development Andrey Belousov, and others.³¹ Tatyana Stanovaya, one of the country's leading political experts, says the Ulyukayev case testifies to the changing nature of the Russian political regime because the unwritten rules of Putin's authoritarianism have been broken by Rosneft initiating the case.³² *Novaya Gazeta* published an investigation claiming that Ulyukayev's case is part of a fierce struggle between the clans within the FSB that has been growing since the beginning of 2016.³³ Whatever the reason, the case was evidence of the political and economic turbulence in Russia during the year.

Electoral Process

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

- Nationwide elections for the Duma were the main political event of 2016. The results were no surprise, as Putin’s United Russia party won its biggest majority ever thanks to a return to a system of mixed proportional and single-member seats and, by expert accounts, widespread fraud. The elections played into the constant bargaining that takes place between elites in Russia’s regions and the Kremlin. The Kremlin was interested in quiet elections without scandals, while regional elites sought to produce the best results for United Russia in order to demonstrate their loyalty and capacity, but also to ensure that their representatives would take more places in the Russian parliament and thus act as effective lobbyists for the elites’ interests in the Duma.
- In March, Central Electoral Commission (TsIK) head Vladimir Churov was replaced by Ella Pamfilova, who had previously served as ombudsperson. Pamfilova’s main responsibility was to improve public trust in the TsIK after the debacle of the 2011 parliamentary elections, when the TsIK was led by Churov.^{34 35} In April, Pamfilova annulled the results of municipal elections in the small town of Barvikha near Moscow and disbanded the local electoral commission after falsifications were uncovered.³⁶
- Parliamentary and local elections were held 18 September 2016. After using a fully proportional system in 2007 and 2011, in 2016 the system returned to its previous arrangement, where half of the 450 members of the Duma were elected in single-member districts and the other half elected proportionally. According to Ekaterina Schulman, a leading expert in the Russian parliamentary system, there were two main reasons for the return: the promise given by then-president Dmitriy Medvedev after the political protests in 2011–12, and United Russia’s need to tie its parliamentarians more closely to their districts through single-seat elections in the midst of an economic crisis.³⁷
- The system performed well for United Russia. The party won over 54 percent of the proportional vote, good for 140 of the 225 seats possible. It performed much better in single-district voting, with 203 out of 225 seats going to the party. United Russia’s resulting 343 seats is an increase of 105 from the previous election and the largest parliamentary majority in the party’s history. The progovernment Communist Party and Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) each reached just over 13 percent in the proportional round but saw their seats decline dramatically due to the single-member seats, from 92 to 42 and from 56 to 39, respectively. The nominally opposition A Just Russia also lost votes and seats, shrinking from 64 to 23 posts in parliament. Three other progovernment candidates were elected from single-member constituencies.^{38 39 40}
- The strongest results for United Russia came in those regions that feature the most authoritarian examples of governance: the Chechen and Ingush Republics; the Republics of Karachay-Cherkessia, Dagestan, Tatarstan, and Mordovia; and the oblast’ of Kemerovo.⁴¹ Experts attributed this pattern to falsification of the results. Sergey Shpilkin, an electoral expert who conducted detailed analysis of the results, found that (as in 2011) precincts with turnout far above the national official average of 47.87 percent voted in far higher percentages for United Russia than precincts with average turnout. Based on his analysis, he concluded that almost 45 percent of the votes for United Russia were falsified at the local and regional levels, and that real voter turnout for the elections was about 36 percent.^{42 43 44} Alexander Kireev, another electoral expert, gave figures showing such falsifications in Chechnya, Dagestan, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Kemerovo, Saratov, and more.⁴⁵ Consequently, he argued the falsifications seemed to be not part of a

centralized Kremlin policy but due to regional authorities seeking to demonstrate loyalty and increase leverage with the Kremlin.

- Local election observation was damaged when Russia’s best-known monitoring organization, Golos, was liquidated in July by court order after a ruling that it had conducted political activity without using the label of “foreign agent.”⁴⁶ The NGO’s appeal claim in October was unsuccessful,⁴⁷ but Golos has continued its activity as a civic movement. Nonetheless, there were fewer than half as many independent observers as during the 2011 elections. According to Golos, the number of crude falsifications decreased in 2016 in comparison with 2011, but direct ballot stuffing was still documented in several regions, and the electoral results were preordained by vast use of administrative resources and an uneven playing field for political actors.⁴⁸ In other words, if under Churov’s TsIK leadership falsifications and other violations were centralized, under Pamfilova’s leadership the violations were decentralized but still not effectively prevented.
- Genuine opposition parties were unable to create a sustainable coalition for the elections, and none of them reached the Duma. An attempt to build such a coalition around the PARNAS party headed by Mikhail Kasyanov failed in May after the Yabloko party headed by Grigory Yavlinsky rejected the coalition and tried to co-opt a number of local leaders and liberals. Yabloko took only a handful of seats in six regional legislatures and in some city councils. Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the exiled former oligarch and former owner of Yukos oil company, supported 19 candidates with some experience in local or regional politics, but none won office.⁴⁹
- Despite the appearance of total dominance, the huge United Russia delegation will be a challenge for the Kremlin’s control in the Duma. Expert Ekaterina Schulman has noted that the problem is that single-seat members depend more on relations in their regions than on the party’s leadership in Moscow, and each single-seat Duma member has support in his/her district.⁵⁰ Another problem created by the parliamentary elections is the further growth of contradictions between the Russian authorities and the regional political elites following the economic crisis. Through the single-seat districts, regional elites can attempt to create their own lobbies in the Duma.⁵¹ This regional lobbyism was the very reason for the turn away from single-seat districts prior to the 2007 elections.

Civil Society

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50

- Russian civil society faced further pressure from the authorities in 2016. It is clear that the Kremlin still fears both the transformation of economic protests into political ones and the possibility of public self-organization in areas it considers political, including LGBT rights. To combat these, the Kremlin and local bureaucracy are primarily focused on the struggle with foreign funding, which targets officially registered NGOs. They do not know how to deal with non-registered networks of citizens or personal initiatives, and must rely on criminal punishment to terrorize non-NGO civic activists.
- The trend of economic protests driven by local grievances continued in 2016. The protests of truck drivers against the new automatic toll collection system for cargo trucks (Platon) that began in November 2015 continued through April 2016, when 92 members of the Duma initiated a claim against the tax in the Constitutional Court.⁵² The court found the system legal in May, however,⁵³ so the only significant result of the protests was a temporary decline of the tax rate on cargo shipping until 2017.⁵⁴ Following the ruling, protests during the summer became intermittent and local rather than national and coordinated. That allowed police to bring pressure to bear on local protest leaders, for example, in Stavropol⁵⁵ and Ryazan.⁵⁶ In November, a new wave of

truck driver protests against Platon appeared⁵⁷ after the release of news that the government wants to double the previously declined tax rate on cargo shipping in 2017.⁵⁸ Police tried to limit protest actions to the local level and prevent their coalescence.⁵⁹

- In August, farmers from the Krasnodar region attempted to organize a tractor march to Moscow against corruption and asset grabbing in the agricultural industry⁶⁰ but were blocked by police.⁶¹ They also tried to coordinate their action with truck drivers from St. Petersburg who wanted to support the farmers, but the action was unsuccessful due to police pressure.⁶²
- The government's offensive against civil society continued throughout the year. In April, Tatyana Moskalkova, a retired police major general and Duma member from 2007 to 2016, became Commissioner for Human Rights. Her appointment indicates the authorities are seeking to control the discourse of human rights in the interests of the authoritarian regime.⁶³
- In June, new amendments to the Russian law governing NGOs were passed. These widened the list of NGO activities that qualify as political to include human rights protection, public discussions, election monitoring, opinion polls, analysis of governmental and local policies, and activities concerning socioeconomic development, law, and efforts in the field of ethnic ("national") relations.⁶⁴ If any NGO conducts any such activity while using any resources from abroad (even for another activity), this organization will be officially labeled a "foreign agent."
- Later in June, Valentina Cherevatenko, head of the nonprofit foundation "Women of Don," was charged with criminal violation of the law because she refused to include the foundation on the Ministry of Justice's list of "foreign agents." Cherevatenko's case became the first criminal proceeding under the "foreign agents" law.⁶⁵
- Russia's best-known election-monitoring organization, Golos, was liquidated by court order in July after a ruling that the NGO conducted political activity without using the label of "foreign agent" (see Electoral Process).⁶⁶ Also in July, the NGO Svobodnoe Slovo (Free Speech) headed by the politician Lev Shlosberg, which published the newspaper *Pskovskaya Gubernia* in Pskov, was designated a "foreign agent" by the Ministry of Justice.⁶⁷ The newspaper is known for its investigations of the participation of Russian military forces in the war in Ukraine. In September, Russia's best-known polling firm, Levada Center, was designated a "foreign agent,"⁶⁸ and the decision was upheld in November.⁶⁹ Through November, six Russian NGOs involved in fighting HIV were designated "foreign agents." Altogether, 43 additional Russian NGOs were designated as "foreign agents" in 2016, and only seven of them were removed from the list: four because they were closed down and three because they stopped receiving foreign funding.^{70, 71}
- In September, the Supreme Court of Russia banned the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, officially the highest representative body of Crimean Tatars in Ukraine,⁷² as an extremist organization, followed by a complaint from the Russian administration in occupied Crimea.⁷³ In November, five Tatar activists in Crimea were charged in the civil unrest that occurred in February 2014 when they tried to resist the initial Russian occupation.⁷⁴
- The Russian government continued its efforts to support ultra-loyal NGOs. The main dimension of such support lies mostly in the field of "patriotic education." In January 2016, the government initiated a program in this area with total funding of almost 1.7 billion rubles (\$26.5 million) through 2020.^{75, 76} Here, "patriotism" is synonymous with loyalty only to the current authorities.
- In November, civic activist Ildar Dadin wrote a letter about the systematic torture he and others experienced in prison in Karelia.⁷⁷ Dadin had earlier become the first prisoner sentenced under article 212.1 of the Russian Criminal Code, which punishes citizens for repeated violation of the rules of public assemblies and pickets. Dadin's letter showed that the prison system in Russia has not changed, and the regime's use of criminal punishment of civic activists can put their lives in danger.
- Throughout the year, pressure against the LGBT community continued. All attempts at organizing LGBT pride parades in Russian cities during the year were blocked.⁷⁸ In October, the

website for LGBT teenagers Deti-404 (Children-404) was blocked by Roskomnadzor.⁷⁹ In December, a music teacher in Krasnoyarsk was fired due to her sexual identity.⁸⁰

Independent Media

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50

- The situation for independent media in Russia deteriorated further in 2016. Media outlets that published information about corruption beyond the control of the authorities faced retribution. State-owned oil company Rosneft and its chairman Igor Sechin played a major role in exerting pressure on the media during the year. The government sought to control the internet further with wide-ranging laws requiring decryption of internet traffic; the main problem for the government is its inability to control citizens' internet activity.
- The newspapers *RBK*, *Vedomosti*, and *Novaya Gazeta* found themselves under pressure during the year for reporting on high-level corruption. In April, owner Mikhail Prokhorov changed *RBK*'s management⁸¹ after it published a number of investigations about Putin's daughters⁸² and stories based on the leaked information about offshore accounts known as the "Panama Papers," which included accounts held by the Russian elite.⁸³ In August, Sechin filed lawsuits against *Vedomosti* and *Novaya Gazeta* after they published stories about Sechin's villa⁸⁴ and yacht,⁸⁵ respectively. *Vedomosti*'s appeals were unsuccessful,⁸⁶ while *Novaya Gazeta* was still appealing at the end of the year.⁸⁷ In September, Rosneft filed a lawsuit against *RBK* seeking 3 billion rubles (\$48.7 million) in damages after it published a story about Sechin's strategy towards BP, which is a minority stakeholder in Rosneft. On 12 December, a court ruled in favor of Rosneft but limited the damages to 390,000 rubles (\$6,300) and retraction and removal of the article.⁸⁸
- In April, Zhalaudi Geriev, a Chechen journalist working with the website Caucasian Knot, was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of drug possession. His lawyer said that Geriev was forced to confess under duress,⁸⁹ and Memorial Human Rights Center recognized him as a political prisoner.⁹⁰
- The government expanded its efforts to control the internet during 2016. In June, the Duma and the Council of Federation approved wide-ranging amendments to counterterrorism laws, commonly referred to as the "Yarovaya Law," which requires telecom companies to record all traffic in the Russian segment of the internet and in domestic cellular networks and make the records available to the FSB for decryption.⁹¹ However, it is still not clear whether or how the technical aspects of the law will be implemented. The law had not been tested as of the end of 2016.
- In November, the social media service LinkedIn was blocked in Russia because the company does not store the personal data of Russian users (between 1.4 and 1.6 million users) on Russian territory.⁹² The targeting of LinkedIn may be a result of the inability of Roskomnadzor, the government agency responsible for the regulation of the internet, to implement such laws against larger foreign players like Facebook and Twitter.⁹³
- The practice of criminal prosecution of regular social media users for even minor acts of forbidden speech expanded during 2016. In May, Andrei Bubeev from Tver was sentenced to two years and three months' confinement for reposting an image on VKontakte (VK) in which Crimea was shown as part of Ukraine.⁹⁴ In October, a pensioner in Chuvashia was given a two-year suspended sentence for the same action.⁹⁵ Also in May, opposition activist Igor Stenin from Astrakhan was sentenced to prison after a post on VK referring to the eradication of "Kremlin occupiers."⁹⁶ In June, Vladimir Luzgin from Perm was fined for reposting a text about the collaboration between German Nazi and Soviet communists during the occupation of Poland in

1939.⁹⁷ In June, Alexey Kungurov from Tyumen, one of the country’s most famous bloggers, was put in pretrial detention after writing a post opposing the current Russian campaign in Syria.⁹⁸

- In February, researcher and blogger Andrey Piontkovsky was forced to leave Russia after being charged with extremism for a post about relations between the Kremlin and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.⁹⁹ Another famous opposition video blogger, Aleksandr Sotnik, was forced to leave Russia in September due to threats against him to which police failed to respond.¹⁰⁰ Sotnik’s channel on YouTube had over 137,000 followers. In October, Anton Nosik, one of the country’s best-known bloggers, was convicted of extremism and fined for a post about the conflict in Syria.¹⁰¹

Local Democratic Governance

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25

- The main challenge in local governance in 2016 was the growing struggle for survival among regional and local political elites. Though these local actors are also economic elites, their resources are much more limited than those of the Kremlin. Thus, the Kremlin is able to maintain its control through intimidation and appointments from Putin’s wide circle.
- Russia formally has direct elections for the governors of federal subjects (which include oblasts, krajs, republics, cities of federal importance, an autonomous oblast, and autonomous okrugs, commonly all referred to as “regions”), but the president’s power to replace governors is often used to circumvent the process. In 2016, there was significant reshuffling of regional governors through appointments. In February, Putin replaced the governor of Tula, Vladimir Gruzdev, with former FSO officer Alexey Dyumin. Dyumin then easily won the election in September.¹⁰² In March, Putin replaced the governor of Tver region with Igor Rudenya, former deputy minister of agriculture. In September, he was elected as governor.¹⁰³ The governor of Kirov region, Nikita Belykh, was arrested in June on corruption charges, and head of the Federal Property Management Agency (Rosreestr) Igor Vasiliev was appointed governor.¹⁰⁴ Because of the method of replacement, Vasiliev will not face elections until 2017.
- In July, Putin replaced the governors of the regions of Yaroslavl (with former FSO general Dmitriy Mironov) and Kaliningrad (with the head of the Kaliningrad FSB who also previously served in Putin’s personal security service, Evgeniy Zinichev¹⁰⁵), and of the city of Sevastopol in occupied Crimea (with a former deputy minister of industry and trade, Dmitry Ovsyannikov).¹⁰⁶ Zinichev was dismissed in October,¹⁰⁷ perhaps due to incompetence,¹⁰⁸ while Mironov and Ovsyannikov remain the acting governors until elections in 2017.
- Partial local elections were also held on 18 September, and United Russia kept its majorities in all regional and municipal legislatures where elections took place: 39 regional legislatures¹⁰⁹ and 11 city councils in regional capitals.¹¹⁰ Nine governors¹¹¹ and the mayor of Kemerovo¹¹² were also elected, all of them members of United Russia. Each legislature has dozens of United Russia party members and a handful of members of other parties, as has been the pattern since 2000.
- The situation in the Chechen Republic continues to develop beyond the bounds of the law. In the spring, there was a conflict between head of the republic Ramzan Kadyrov and Avars (a local ethnic minority) in the village of Kenkhi. Chechen police blocked the village for several days in order to arrest a man who had personally offended Kadyrov.¹¹³ In October, Kadyrov ordered the police to kill drug dealers in the republic.¹¹⁴ Kadyrov’s independence from Russian laws has grown dramatically, and the Kremlin seems unable to deal with the situation.^{115 116}
- United Russia’s push to dominate local politics led to conflicts in some regions. In January, the United Russia mayor of Buynaksk (Republic of Dagestan), Gusein Gamzatov, submitted his

resignation after clashing with the local Party of Veterans. The conflict was based on the fact that the mayor had been elected by the previous council, which had a majority of United Russia members, and was unable to negotiate with the Party of Veterans in the attempt to dominate the council.¹¹⁷

- In August, mayors of cities in Irkutsk region, who are mostly members of United Russia, clashed with governor Sergey Levchenko, who is a member of the Communist Party and the only governor to defeat United Russia’s candidate in the 2015 round of gubernatorial elections.¹¹⁸ The conflict appeared in the face of the coming elections and was a consequence of United Russia’s goal of improving its results in the region. In the end, four Irkutsk candidates were elected to the Duma from United Russia, and only two candidates were elected from the Communist Party.¹¹⁹ The political conflict continued after the elections.¹²⁰
- Throughout 2016, there was evidence of an escalation of conflicts among Russian regional elites under the label of “the struggle against corruption.” In Sverdlovsk region, the leadership of the regional Ministry of Public Property was arrested in April on charges of bribery, provoking a political crisis in the region.¹²¹ In June, mayor of Vladivostok Igor Pushkarev was charged with official misconduct and arrested. Conflict between the mayor and the governor of Primorsky region, Vladimir Miklushevsky, was the most probable cause for the arrest.¹²²
- In Perm region, three ministers were arrested: the minister of communications in June,¹²³ minister of sport in October,¹²⁴ and minister of transportation in October.¹²⁵ All are suspected of abuse of power. In Orenburg region, the minister of sport was arrested in October on suspicion of tax dodging.¹²⁶ In November, vice governor of Saint Petersburg Marat Oganesyanyan was arrested on suspicion of fraud.¹²⁷ Also in November in Kemerovo, the head of the regional office of the Investigative Committee, Sergey Kalinkin; two deputy governors, Alexey Ivanov and Alexander Danil’chenko; and other officials were charged with extortion. According to investigators, they sought to take a controlling stake in the coal company Razrez Inskoy owned by businessman Anton Tsygankov, who has been under arrest since July.¹²⁸

Judicial Framework and Independence

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.50

- The judicial framework in Russia and the independence of courts decayed even further in 2016. The Kremlin’s political interests, or even the interests of other influential actors, openly take precedence in the judicial system over principles provided by the Constitution. The disregard for the independence of the judiciary shown by the head of the Republic of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov has become a glaring example of the system’s deterioration.
- In April, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Russian Federation is allowed to ignore the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights if the decision contradicts Russian interests.¹²⁹ In November, Russia withdrew its signature from the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC). Although it had never ratified the treaty, withdrawing the signature also meant the end to any form of cooperation with the court.¹³⁰
- Legal processes against Ukrainians charged with murder or terrorism showed that the court’s decisions are not independent in cases of the Kremlin’s or the FSB’s political interests. In March, a court sentenced Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, who maintained that she had been kidnapped from Ukrainian territory, to 22 years in prison.¹³¹ In May, she was pardoned and exchanged for Russian military intelligence operatives Evgeniy Erofeev and Aleksandr Aleksandrov, who were captured in Donbas in 2015.¹³²

- In March, Ukrainian film director and political activist Oleg Sentsov, who was charged with terrorism in Crimea in 2015 and sentenced to 20 years in prison, was transferred from Chelyabinsk to distant Yakutsk, which could be a form of psychological pressure on the famous political prisoner.¹³³ Nikolai Karpyuk, a Ukrainian political activist, and Stanislav Klykh, a Ukrainian citizen, were sentenced by a Chechen court to 22.5 and 20 years in prison, respectively, for participation in the Chechen war in 1994–95. Despite a total absence of evidence of guilt, their appeal to the Supreme Court was unsuccessful in October.¹³⁴ In November, they appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.¹³⁵
- Events in Chechnya showed how the executive branch can dominate at the local level. In May, Ramzan Kadyrov forced Magomed Karataev, chief justice of Chechnya’s Supreme Court, to retire.¹³⁶ Kadyrov accused Karataev and his deputies of incompetence and corruption, although none has been legally charged. In October, speaker of the Chechen parliament and close Kadyrov ally Magomed Daudov (known by his nickname “Lord”) allegedly beat Karataev’s replacement, Takhir Murdalov, the acting chief justice of the Supreme Court.¹³⁷ These incidents show how weak and fragmented the judicial branch is in Russia.
- The number of political prisoners in Russia grew in 2016. According to an October report by Memorial, the number has more than doubled since 2015 from 50 to 102 as of 28 October.¹³⁸ That number includes 50 people sentenced for religious beliefs, all of them Muslims, without any charges of violence.¹³⁹ The judicial system still continues its work de facto in favor of the party in power, in close coordination with prosecutors and investigators.
- The number of tapped telephones has grown steadily over the last 10 years. In 2015, 800,000 phones were tapped in Russia, and experts estimate the number surpassed one million in 2016.¹⁴⁰ The human rights organization Agora estimates that 6 percent of Russia’s population has had at least one phone conversation recorded in the last nine years. Russian courts grant 97 percent of requests for wiretaps. The total number of such requests is more than 4.6 million since 2007.¹⁴¹
- In January, the Presidential Council on Human Rights recognized the renaissance of a criminal subculture among teenagers embodied in the so-called AUE youth movement. The AUE exists in at least 18 Russian regions.¹⁴² The activists of the movement, teenagers connected with organized crime, extort money from their classmates, send the money to gangsters in prison, and recruit new followers using social media like VKontakte.¹⁴³ The movement testifies to the deep inefficiency of the Russian judicial and correctional systems.

Corruption

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75

- Corruption remains the core of the Russian authoritarian system. Every level of the administrative hierarchy in Russia is structured around the extraction of administrative rent. Simon Kordonsky¹⁴⁴ and Lev Gudkov¹⁴⁵ have described this system in their work, and the concept of “extractive institutions” outlined by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson is also applicable.¹⁴⁶ Throughout 2016, more and more evidence of the pervasiveness of high-level corruption emerged in the public domain. All levels of the Russian political leadership are involved in corrupt activities. Despite occasional arrests, the political system does not struggle with corruption in any real way but, rather, tries to ignore new evidence of it.
- In 2016, the Russian state’s share in the economy reached 70 percent, according to former minister of finance Alexey Kudrin.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, an estimated 30 million people, or 40 percent of the economically active population, are involved in the “shadow” economy, i.e., they

do not pay taxes on at least some of their economic activity. Some 8.7 million of those work completely outside of the official economy.¹⁴⁸

- There were several new revelations in 2016 that demonstrated the involvement of top-level Russian officials in grand corruption. Opposition politician Ilya Yashin and his team documented the corrupt nature of Ramzan Kadyrov's regime in Chechnya in their February 2016 report, "The National Security Threat."¹⁴⁹ According to the report, for example, Chechen businesses and even regular Chechen citizens pay contributions to a foundation officially controlled by Ramzan Kadyrov's mother. At the same time, Kadyrov is involved in major criminal activities in the rest of Russia and retains a private army with thousands of soldiers.
- Following the publication of the Panama Papers in April, it became clear that billions of U.S. dollars from Russian businesses have collected in offshore companies owned by Sergey Roldugin, a cellist in Valery Gergiev's orchestra and an old friend of Putin's. There have been no legal consequences or official investigations stemming from these revelations.¹⁵⁰
- In October, an investigation by Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation testified to the involvement of Katerina Tikhonova, reported to be the daughter of Vladimir Putin, in enrichment schemes through federal property and contributions from Russian businesses. According to the investigation, Tikhonova heads a foundation that develops lands owned by Moscow State University and has significant support from the biggest Russian companies. Her foundation, Innopraktika, collected at least 452 million rubles (\$7.8 million) from Russian state-owned companies and 425 million rubles (\$7.3 million) from unknown sources in 2015–16 alone.¹⁵¹
- Tikhonova's reported husband, Kirill Shamalov, is another example of the curious enrichment of Putin's inner circle. The son of one of Putin's closest friends, Shamalov acquired more than one fifth of the petrochemical giant Sibur after marrying Tikhonova (in 2013) and became the youngest billionaire on Forbes's Russia list.¹⁵²
- In April, Transparency International (TI) published an investigation into the apartments of Deputy Prime Minister Dmitriy Rogozin valued at 500 million rubles (\$8.6 million). Rogozin is a longtime public servant; he and his wife's official annual income in 2012 was roughly 6.7 million rubles (\$115,000).¹⁵³
- Despite the report of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation on the business interests of Prosecutor General Yuriy Chaika and his sons, which it connected with organized crime and money laundering,¹⁵⁴ Chaika has not resigned. Instead, his appointment was extended for another term in June.¹⁵⁵ In November, Leonid Korzhinek, the prosecutor of Krasnodar region who Navalny's report linked to the Chaika family's business interests, became a Deputy Prosecutor General.¹⁵⁶
- In July, Navalny and his team published new investigations into the fortune of First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, who has been in public service since 1997. According to the investigation, Shuvalov owns huge apartments in Moscow worth 600 million rubles (\$10.3 million)¹⁵⁷ and he and his wife travel on a private jet worth \$50 million.¹⁵⁸
- In August, Bloomberg reported, based on leaked documents from Spanish police, that Aleksandr Torshin, deputy head of the Central Bank of Russia and a former senator, had instructed members of the Taganskaya crime syndicate of Moscow in how to launder money in Spain.¹⁵⁹ There were no consequences for Torshin following the publication.
- During summer and autumn 2016, Russian journalists continued to investigate the fortune of Igor Sechin, head of the state-owned oil company Rosneft, who seems to be a multimillionaire despite the company's economic troubles. Rosneft's revenue declined 11.4 percent and its debt increased to \$46.3 billion between January and September 2016.¹⁶⁰ Among other things, Sechin reportedly is building a villa near Moscow on a plot of land worth \$30 million,¹⁶¹ and his wife in recent years has spent weeks aboard a yacht worth \$150 million.¹⁶²
- In November, TI published a report on how Marat Khusnullin, a Deputy Mayor of Moscow, enriched himself during his public service in Tatarstan from 2001 to 2010, following another

report about his self-dealing in Moscow since 2010.¹⁶³ The main method of Khusnullin's enrichment, according to TI, was the provision of public contracts to companies affiliated with him.

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