Russia

by Robert W. Orttung

Capital: Moscow
Population: 142.2 million
GNI/capita: US$12,740

The social data above was taken from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's *Transition Report 2007: People in Transition*, and the economic data from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2008*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Electoral Process	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.50	**6.75**
Civil Society	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	**5.50**
Independent Media	4.75	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	**6.25**
Governance*	4.50	5.00	5.25	5.00	5.25	n/a	n/a	n/a	**n/a**
National Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	6.00	6.00	**6.25**
Local Democratic Governance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	**5.75**
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.75	5.25	5.25	5.25	**5.25**
Corruption	6.25	6.25	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	**6.00**
Democracy Score	**4.58**	**4.88**	**5.00**	**4.96**	**5.25**	**5.61**	**5.75**	**5.86**	**5.96**

** 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

Russia has faced numerous difficulties since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Upon coming to power in 2000, President Vladimir Putin has consistently sought to concentrate power, control electoral outcomes, reduce media freedom, and tighten constraints on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Like Boris Yeltsin before him, he has failed to make much headway in the battle against corruption.

The central political event of 2007 was Putin's selection of First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev as his successor, to be elected president March 2, 2008, and the subsequent announcement that Putin would stay on in power, serving as prime minister. Putin's action serves to extend his term in power for the foreseeable future. Pro-Kremlin parties won the vast majority of seats in the State Duma elections on December 2. In these elections, Putin and his allies used state resources, particularly state-controlled television, to support the pro-Kremlin parties and crush any conceivable opposition. The elections were neither free nor fair. The Russian authorities put in place such severe restrictions on foreign oversight that monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) refused to observe the elections.

National Democratic Governance. The key issue for 2007 was the presidential succession. Putin made it clear that he would not leave the political stage after the end of his constitutionally-mandated two terms in office. This decision leaves in place the current elite and allows them to continue managing the economic assets they gained control over during the last eight years. The system is characterized by intimidation and political passivity on the part of the population. *Russia's rating for national democratic governance drops from 6.00 to 6.25. Putin's decision to remain in power demonstrates that the political system is increasingly authoritarian, with little accountability to the population and few opportunities for substantial public participation in the decision-making process. While the system is stable in the short term, the mid- and long-term prospects are bleak because such a top-heavy government has little ability to understand what is going on in Russian society and react to social change effectively.*

Electoral Process. The State Duma elections were neither free nor fair, setting the stage for similarly controlled presidential elections in 2008. Russia placed such strict constraints on international observers that the OSCE monitors ultimately decided not to observe the elections. The campaign was skewed in favor of United Russia, the party of power, with the authorities making extensive use of state resources to ensure victory. Opposition parties were harassed at every step. The

national television networks, under the control of the government, promoted pro-Kremlin parties through their news coverage, thereby creating a playing field that was not level. *Russia's rating for electoral process drops from 6.50 to 6.75. The 2007 parliamentary elections set a new level of state control over the electoral process in Russia and prepared the ground for equally undemocratic presidential elections in 2008.*

Civil Society. Russia's NGOs continue to face intense pressure from the Russian state, particularly in complying with the provisions of the 2006 Law on NGOs. The state applies the law more harshly against NGOs it does not favor, and many are having trouble meeting its onerous requirements. Kremlin-sponsored groups like Nashi harass the opposition and Moscow-based diplomats alike. *Russia's rating for civil society worsens from 5.25 to 5.50 because of the implementation of the Law on NGOs, increasing restrictions on the right to public protest, greater use of psychiatric hospitals against activists, and growing political propaganda in the education system.*

Independent Media. The state continues to exercise extensive control over television, radio, and the print media. Only a few exceptional outlets and the Internet remain open for political discussion. While the Kremlin has not limited the range of free discussion on the Internet, critics accuse it of funding online attacks against opponents, while regional authorities have filed criminal charges against some bloggers who criticize them. *Russia's rating for independent media remains at 6.25 as the state continues to put binding limits on free expression. Attempts to assert more control over the Internet do not bode well for the future.*

Local Democratic Governance. In an era of centralization, local government in Russia remains an afterthought. Putin used his power to appoint governors to shore up his political support in advance of the State Duma elections. Mayors are increasingly dependent on governors and the rest of the political hierarchy. The federal government has returned to a process of signing treaties with some regions, suggesting that federal laws do not apply equally to all. Chechnya has achieved relative calm, but at the cost of continued suppression of civil and political liberties. At the same time, violence continues to plague neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia. *Russia's rating for local democratic governance remains at 5.75 because centralizing tendencies remain strong, denying the population much tangible influence in the conduct of local affairs.*

Judicial Framework and Independence. Russia's courts are subject to political manipulation and can be reliably counted on to return the decisions needed by the authorities. Major problems remain in terms of pre-trial detention, lengthy trials, the failure to implement court decisions, and the poor quality of the defense. The greatest indictment of the Russian court system is the large number of citizens who believe that they cannot get a fair hearing and seek redress at the European Court of Human Rights. Although there are provisions for jury trials, they are rarely used, and the decisions are often overturned by higher courts. *Russia's rating for judicial*

framework and independence remains at 5.25 because of the system's inability to assert greater independence. While some reforms have been implemented, such as increasing the role of judges, it will be a long time before these reforms change the way the system actually operates.

Corruption. Bribery and other forms of corruption continue to pervade Russian society: Official efforts to address the problem have mostly amounted to politically driven campaigns to discredit opponents. *Russia's rating for corruption stays the same at 6.00 because in conditions where there is not a free press, energetic civil society, and independent judiciary, there are few prospects for making substantial progress in the battle against bribery and abuse of public office.*

Outlook for 2008. Putin has made clear that he will remain in power, serving now as prime minister along with his handpicked successor as president. Accordingly, the presidential elections are meaningless, as is the campaign leading up to them. This outcome means that there is little chance Russia's political process will open up or gain democratic legitimacy in the foreseeable future.

Main Report

National Democratic Governance

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25

Russia does not have a democratic political system. Instead, there is a facade of democracy, with a Constitution, formal elections, political parties, and other attributes typically found in democracies. However, without public accountability, a free media, and independent courts, the incumbent leadership can manipulate the entire structure to its benefit. Such a system may be able to maintain itself in power for decades, but ultimately it will lose touch with society and become unstable.

Quickly following the Kremlin's stage-managed victory in the December parliamentary elections, President Vladimir Putin announced that he would remain in power as prime minister, working with his handpicked successor as president, Dmitry Medvedev. With all the backing of the state's resources and the elimination of any potential opposition, Medvedev was set to win the presidency, presumably to serve in a ceremonial role, while Putin and the shadowy security, law enforcement, and military groups around him continue to call the shots. Putin had to settle for this inelegant solution because the Constitution rules out the possibility of a third consecutive presidential term. By choosing to remain in power, Putin has violated the spirit of the Russian Constitution, if not its letter. Putin's continuing role at the top of the country's hierarchy reflects the complete lack of institutionalization of the Russian political system and the absence of a functioning procedure for identifying new leaders in a democratic manner.[1]

The main beneficiaries of Putin's decision are the secret service representatives and other advisers around him who will also remain in power and continue to benefit from their incumbency at the top of the political system. More than half of the senior staff in the Kremlin have connections to the intelligence services, according to the estimates of sociologist Olga Khryshtanovskaya.[2] This elite is not monolithic, and there will be continuing struggles among the various Kremlin clans, perhaps stimulated further because Medvedev does not himself have a secret service background.

The central issue of Russian politics is the distribution of property in the country. Putin's decision to remain in power means that the current elite will continue to control the enormous monetary flows associated with Russia's increasingly state-dominated economy. In the current Russian system, property ownership is not as important as controlling state assets, such as the energy companies, and the revenues they create. Putin has overseen an enormous transfer of property, and now he must stay on to ensure the safety of that transfer. Formal property rights are of little significance.

Putin's continued tenure signals that the Constitution and Russia's political institutions have little practical meaning. The system is designed for one individual and the people surrounding him. While Putin and his supporters claim that his continued rule is based on his personal popularity, in the absence of fair elections, a free media, and a vibrant civil society, there is no way to measure his real popularity. All institutions outside the executive have been weakened—the Parliament has no power to oppose the executive branch, while the courts lack the independence to decide political issues.

Intimidation is now a central feature of the political system. With the collapse of the Soviet system at the end of 1991, most citizens felt free to speak and act in the political arena according to their conscience, but that is no longer true. Today, pressure by the authorities, combined with traditionally low levels of citizen participation and engagement, breeds political passivity. Rules are written so that they can be applied against anybody at any time. A selective application of repression makes for a very efficient system of management. By silencing a few key individuals, the regime is able to keep most of the rest of the population in line. People now understand that it is better to remain passive than to say anything negative about the political system. This atmosphere of repression explains the growing number of people who answer, "I don't know," in polls conducted by the Levada Center about the political system, according to Lev Gudkov, the center's director.[3]

In order to ensure conformity, the ruling elite constantly emphasize the threat of an outside enemy, which would menace society without the Kremlin's protection. For example, Putin told a November 21 campaign rally in Moscow that "those who oppose us do not want us to implement our plan.…They need a weak nation, a sick nation…so that they can covertly work out their deals and receive their reward at our expense."[4] Likewise pursuing an aggressive foreign policy makes it possible to deflect attention from domestic issues.

The current system is self-maintaining and stable in the short term. Putin is very careful in his choice of personnel: When a high-level official is fired, he is moved into another job of generally equal importance. Putin is using this technique to avoid creating any enemies among the elite, as Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev did.[5] In a process that could last decades, this system will likely collapse as the incumbent leaders age and few new people will be brought in to implement necessary reforms. With a lack of open discussion, there is little chance that Russia's leadership or society will generate new ideas to address the challenges the country faces.

The Federal Security Service (former KGB known by its Russian initials as the FSB) and other law enforcement groups that surround Putin are calling for the imposition of a new regime, which would include increased state regulation of the economy and strict limits on political activities. Currently, these groups are fighting with one another over control of various agencies and assets. But Viktor Cherkesov, a key Putin ally who heads the antidrug agency, has made public appeals for all of the security agents to work together to serve their corporate interests while blocking

the rise of other interests in Russian society.[6] Putin currently is the only arbiter among these feuding clans.[7]

Given its security service style of management, Russia is increasingly relying on giant state corporations to control strategic sectors of the economy. This trend is dangerous because it undermines the economic growth that Russia has achieved since the 1998 financial meltdown. Most economists agree that state corporations work less efficiently than private ones. They are also opaque and well positioned to secure subsidies and tax benefits from the government. Today, these corporations have extensive control over the energy sector, shipbuilding, aircraft construction, and nuclear energy and are likely to take over a wide variety of new areas, such as automobile production, drug manufacturing, and fishing.

Electoral Process

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.75

The December 2, 2007, State Duma elections were neither free nor fair. They violated international norms and Russia's own declared commitment to free elections, calling into question the result's legitimacy. The parliamentary elections set the stage for the March 2008 presidential elections, which also will be managed from above with little room for voter participation beyond ratifying a choice made in the Kremlin.

In the 2007 Duma elections, the Kremlin used extensive state resources, including its control of television, radio, and many newspapers, to guarantee that it would win a supermajority of the seats.[8] Reports indicated that voters felt coerced to take part and the authorities sought to influence the way people voted through such tactics as workplace pressure, particularly on public sector employees.[9] The number of absentee ballots increased greatly over the 2003 elections, another indicator of suspicious activity in Russian conditions. Ultimately, four parties secured seats in the Parliament: United Russia (64 percent of the vote); Communist Party (12 percent); Liberal Democratic Party (8 percent); and Just Russia (8 percent). Three of these parties support the Kremlin, with only the Communists in nominal opposition. The pro-Kremlin parties won 393 seats and the Communists 57 in the 450-seat body.[10]

There was clear evidence of abnormalities in the vote counts from some regions. In Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Mordova, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Dagestan, Bashkortostan, and Tatarstan, turnout was far above the Russian average and support for the chief pro-Kremlin party ranged from 81 to 99 percent.[11] In the major urban areas, United Russia did not do as well, and there the elections were probably conducted more fairly.

The election proceeded according to Kremlin plans from the beginning. Eleven parties participated in the campaign, while Other Russia (Garry Kasparov) and

Great Russia (Dmitry Rogozin) were not allowed to compete. Critics charged that the registration service based its decision to remove these genuine opposition parties on a variety of technicalities, narrowing the field and making it easier for the pro-Kremlin United Russia to dominate.

The campaign itself lacked substance. United Russia, which brought together almost all of Russia's leaders from Putin to more than 60 governors, refused to participate in the campaign debates, dismissing them as nothing but "squabbles."[12] The authorities thus avoided addressing difficult questions from the electorate. The party instead ran on what it called "Putin's Plan," signaling a continuation of the status quo. The result was no debating of the government position, with the likely consequence of low-quality public policy.

The authorities blocked international and independent domestic observers from monitoring the elections in a substantive manner. Russian authorities made conditions so difficult for election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that they decided not to monitor the elections because they did not have sufficient monitors or time for advance fieldwork to do a credible job of assessing the election's validity. Russia offered to admit 70 OSCE observers, down from 450 in 2003, and made visas available only one month before the voting, rather than the usual three months.[13] The OSCE rejected these conditions (foreshadowing its actions in the March 2008 presidential elections). The authorities also pressured independent domestic monitoring organizations like Golos, which is funded by the European Commission and United States Agency for International Development.[14] Nevertheless, Golos reported violations, such as illegal campaigning on election day and numerous efforts to block monitors from doing their job.[15] A Samara court blocked Russia's registration service from dissolving the Samara branch of the organization, which had declared the Duma elections undemocratic.[16]

Changes in the electoral law had a profound impact on the elections. The 2007 elections were conducted purely on the basis of party lists, eliminating the previous system whereby half of the seats were elected from single-member districts, which collectively represented all of Russia's regions. Without the district elections, the parliamentary campaign lost its connection to real local issues. Now Moscow has control of the party lists and can block the rise of unwanted regional politicians. The Kremlin directly created two of four parties now in the Parliament and seems to prefer to work with parties that it established rather than authentic parties that maintain some autonomy. Many of the big names on the party lists, including Putin and many of the governors, did not accept their seats, allowing the parties to fill them with lesser-known people who are beholden to the Kremlin leadership for their positions.[17]

A key element in the Kremlin victory was the hierarchy of electoral commissions. Vladimir Churov became head of the Central Electoral Commission on March 27. He had worked closely with Putin in the 1990s in St. Petersburg. Russia changed its legislation specifically for Churov, allowing people without law degrees to join the Central Electoral Commission. Since the Russian procurator general or a regional

procurator must agree with charges against an electoral commission member, it is highly unlikely that such officials could ever be charged with the crime of vote rigging.[18]

On October 1, Putin agreed to personally lead United Russia, lending the party his personal popularity and the resources of the state. There were no limits on what the authorities would do to ensure victory. On October 22, Russia's largest food distributors "voluntarily" agreed to freeze the prices of milk, vegetable oil, cheese, bread, and other basic goods through the end of January 2008 in a thinly veiled effort to win popular support. United Russia also placed its symbol on state-owned vehicles, and election officials often spoke in favor of the party, according to a report on party activities in 40 regions prepared by Transparency International.[19] Leaders of government organizations and private enterprises were under pressure to mobilize their workers to deliver a high turnout for Putin's party. As noted earlier, turnout in many regions defied credibility. Additionally, the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations released a report on November 12 showing that Russia's television stations devoted most of their coverage to Putin and United Russia. The report said that Channel One set aside 96.5 percent of its coverage to state bodies and pro-government political parties.

During the course of the campaign, Union of Right Forces leaders claimed that 10 million copies of their newspaper were seized and that an additional 4 million copies were being held at the printing houses where they were produced. Party leaders claimed that the authorities were preventing them from campaigning.[20] The Communists and Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) also reported harassment: For example, police confiscated equipment from a printing plant in Omsk as it prepared to print material for the Communists.

Civil Society

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
3.75	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.50

Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are under extreme pressure from the state. In fact, many Russian NGOs are finding it necessary to open offices outside of Russia to continue their activities. Examples include the International Protection Center, which opened in Strasbourg in July 2006 in order to handle Chechen cases at the European Court of Human Rights in case its Moscow office is closed.

The adoption of the new Law on NGOs in 2006 continues to complicate life for the organizations working in this sector. Between April 2006 and the beginning of November 2007, the Moscow Federal Registration Service directorate denied registration to 1,380 NGOs—11 percent of the 13,014 applications it received—because of "inconsistencies in the founding documents" and "their inappropriate completion," according to the head of the Moscow branch of the Federal Registration

Service, Ivan Kondrat.[21] The Moscow Helsinki Group reported that the authorities had closed 2,300 organizations by the end of 2007.[22] Registering an NGO is now three times as expensive as registering a business and takes longer, according to a study conducted by Moscow State University's Economics Faculty and the Higher School of Economics.[23]

Most NGOs are having difficulty meeting the requirements of the legislation. Before the 2006 law went into effect, Russia had more than 500,000 registered NGOs, though it is impossible to say how many were actually active and how many existed only on paper.[24] Currently, there are 216,000 domestic and 226 foreign-run NGOs in Russia.[25] Only 36 percent of the NGOs registered in Russia had reported the results of their work to the Federal Registration Service by September 1, meaning most were in violation of the law, according to Sergei Vasiliev, head of the Federal Registration Service.[26] Some NGOs have been hit with excessive demands. For example, St. Petersburg's Citizen Watch, which seeks to establish parliamentary and civic oversight over the police, security service, and armed forces, was asked to disclose its correspondence with everyone it had been in touch with for the period between July 2004 and July 2007, including e-mails.

Many human rights groups get their funding from Western sources since very few domestic sources are available. Now the Russian government is trying to provide more funding and awarded 1.25 billion rubles (US$51 million) to a variety of nongovernmental groups on November 6. The largest recipients included the pro-Kremlin nationalist youth group Nashi, which holds a summer youth camp each year. The authorities sought to show that they were being evenhanded by giving awards to authentic human rights defenders such as the Moscow Helsinki Group, Memorial, and For Human Rights. However, it later turned out that the national office of Memorial had not applied for funds, just the branch organizations in Vladimir and Ivanovo, without coordinating with the organization's leadership. For Human Rights, another group that received funding, was in fact a regional organization with a similar name to the better-known human rights organization but not connected to it.[27]

Pro-Kremlin groups like Nashi play a negative role in Russian society. They harass what little political opposition there is—for example, giving independent Duma member Vladimir Ryzhkov an American flag on his birthday, symbolizing their belief that he is not acting in Russia's interests. In 2007, activists from the group also hectored the Estonian and British ambassadors. Police have provided Nashi activists with training so that they can help counter demonstrations by opposition groups. Toward the end of the year, the Kremlin cut off most of Nashi's funding, pointing out that the group was no longer necessary since there was not likely to be a Ukraine-style Orange Revolution in Russia. Nashi's original purpose was to prevent such a grassroots uprising among young people.[28]

The state crackdown on officially-registered NGOs is creating a new phenomenon in Russia: unofficial organizations of citizens working together for specific purposes.[29] These groups address citizen concerns in areas such as deceived investors, rules of the road, environmentalism, and urban planning. Much of this

activity takes place on the Internet. Accordingly, civic society capacity in Russia potentially remains strong, but many of its activities must now take place outside official institutions.

Citizens are also losing their right to engage in public demonstrations. The NGO Legal Team studied all of the public protests held across Russia during the first nine months of 2007 and concluded that the authorities had banned or dispersed almost every one of them.[30] While the law permits such demonstrations, the authorities' implementation of approval procedures makes such protest impossible in practice. In the past, protesters detained were given administrative fines; now they often face 15-day prison terms. On September 4, Moscow mayor Yurii Luzhkov issued a decree restricting demonstrations near historical or cultural landmarks, requiring the city's Cultural Heritage Committee to approve them. Since demonstrations typically take place near such monuments, the requirement amounts to an attempt to block such gatherings from taking place in well-populated downtown areas. The authorities also took action against prominent protesters: Opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was arrested on November 25—and released later that day—for participating in an unauthorized anti-Putin demonstration. Garry Kasparov was also arrested during the course of his campaign activities on November 24 and released five days later.

Russian authorities continue to use psychiatric hospitals as a form of punishment for critical activists. After she published an article on such practices in Murmansk, Larisa Arap was herself imprisoned for six weeks.[31] A court ultimately ordered her release. In custody, Arap found others sent to such hospitals for political reasons, as a result of business conflicts, or because they were inconvenient witnesses in criminal cases. In some cases, people seeking to take over the apartment of residents who do not want to sell can pay a bribe to have the resident declared insane, at which point the residents lose many of their rights, and it becomes much easier to take over their property.[32]

Ethnic intolerance remains a major problem. According to Sova, an independent NGO that tracks hate-crimes across Russia, there were 632 victims of such crimes in 2007—including 67 people who died.[33] The 2007 numbers marked an increase as the group counted 564 victims, including 61 deaths, in 2006. A Moscow Human Rights Bureau report on youth extremism in Russia claimed that there were 141 active extremist youth groups with approximately half a million members. Many of the groups are concentrated in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In its analysis of 2007, Sova found that, unfortunately, prosecutions of violent crimes dropped for the first time since 2003.

Independent trade unions have difficulty protecting worker rights. The largest trade union, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions, is closely associated with United Russia and the Kremlin and does little to help workers. Smaller trade unions have great difficulty in their efforts to secure better conditions for workers and striking to promote their members' aims. Although the Constitution protects the right to strike, carrying out labor actions is difficult in practice. According to the labor code, the first step in legally conducting a strike is calling a meeting of

all enterprise employees, a feat that is extremely difficult to achieve. If a majority support a more forward, a list of demands must be presented to management. After the directors respond, there is a reconciliation process. A strike can legally begin only if this process fails. The courts typically side with employers in declaring strikes illegal, according to Elena Gerasimova, director of the Social and Labor Rights Center.[34] However, when strikes are held, they frequently result in higher salaries and better conditions.

There were numerous labor actions across Russia in 2007. Workers on the railroad have been staging "work to the rule" protests to avoid the possibility of the law being used against them. Additionally, workers at Russia's largest carmaker, AvtoVAZ, held a one-day strike on August 1 to demand higher wages. In that action, the authorities detained union official Aleksandr Dzyuban, who had taken a lead in organizing the strike. At the Ford plant in Leningrad oblast, workers held the first open-ended strike since Putin came to power.[35] The strike lasted 25 days in November and December before the workers voted to end it.[36] According to Federation of Independent Trade Unions head Mikhail Shmakov, there have been more strikes in Russia recently, even though it is almost impossible to strike legally.[37]

There is an increasing amount of political influence and propaganda in the education system. During the summer, there was an intensive discussion about a new high school history teachers' manual that painted a positive picture of the Stalin era and included an extremely laudatory picture of Putin's time in office, claiming that many of Russia's successes were connected with his name.[38] A new textbook, which was based on the manual and has been approved for classroom use, carried these themes forward by presenting the authorities' version of history without trying to instill abilities in the students critical thinking so that they could conduct their own analysis.[39]

The authorities have sought to stamp out some unwanted foreign influence in Russia. On December 12, they ordered the closure of British Council offices in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. The British Council is devoted to promoting British culture and teaching English around the world.

Independent Media

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
4.75	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.25

The federal authorities exert extensive control over Russia's television and radio broadcasters and much of the print media. Free speech remains in a few newspapers, on the Ekho Moskvy radio station, and over the Internet. But the situation is dismal. Reporters Without Borders ranked Russia 144 out of 169 countries studied in 2007.[40]

In recent years, Kremlin-connected oligarchs have been buying up the last outposts of media that still provide critical coverage. For example, Alisher Usmanov,

who has close ties to Gazprom, now owns *Kommersant* and gazeta.ru. While he has not forced these outlets to take a pro-government line, he clearly has the power to do so if necessary. Under publisher and editor in chief Konstantin Remchukov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* has been able to criticize some aspects of the government's policies, including its takeover of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Central Electoral Commission, though it is far from an opposition paper.[41] On September 14, the authorities arrested *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*'s deputy editor, Boris Zemtsov, on extortion charges—apparently in an attempt to limit the paper's criticisms.

Beyond influencing the actions of rich individuals, the Putin government has an extensive arsenal to use against the media, including frequent tax audits, complex reregistration procedures, orders to present the government in a positive light, blacklists of who cannot be allowed on the air, bans on live reporting and debate in talk shows, and public officials who tell companies not to advertise on certain stations.[42] Accordingly, most outlets are willing to toe the Kremlin line or focus on nonpolitical information, highlighting entertainment, business, and sports.

In July, Putin signed amendments to the Law on Extremism that make "public slander of state officials," "humiliating national pride," "hampering the lawful activity of state organizations," and "hooliganism committed for political or ideological motives" extremist acts. Critics claim that the provisions of the law are so broad that it can be used to stifle the political opposition and independent journalists. In one example of how the law is being used, Andrei Piontkovsky, a prominent member of the Yabloko party, was put on trial for extremism because of passages in his books, *Unloved Country* and *For the Motherland! For Abramovich! Fire!*, which allegedly stirred violence against Russians, Jews, and Americans.[43] The absurd nature of the case became clear when the prosecution was not able to cite concrete passages where Piontkovsky's books were "extremist." The court is currently seeking more information before ruling. Many observers see Piontkovsky's case as a warning to less prominent critics to be careful of what they say.

There are plenty of cases of regional officials working to keep local publications in line. For example, on May 11 the police in Samara investigated the local office of *Novaya Gazeta* for allegedly using pirated software and confiscated three computers.[44] The use of illegal software is common in Russia, and investigating such charges is a favorite ploy of the authorities against opposition groups. The special services thus kill two birds with one stone—shut down the opposition by confiscating their computers and show the West that they are combating software piracy, at least selectively.

The Internet is the last frontier for free media in Russia. One-quarter of Russian adults are now online, marking a slow increase over previous years.[45] So far, the authorities have not imposed explicit bans on Internet speech. However, many opposition parties and other activists accuse the authorities of using various forms of cyber-warfare to block their sites. Such efforts are more effective and less costly than outright censorship since it is impossible to identify the source of the attacks. In a similar vein, Internet users were particularly concerned when Kremlin-connected magnate Aleksandr Mamut purchased the LiveJournal blogging site

from its original San Francisco–based owners.[46] Critics fear that he will institute free speech limits on the site. In addition, the Kremlin is creating a series of pro-government Web sites and a network of friendly bloggers.

At the same time, local officials have filed criminal cases against a number of bloggers outside of Moscow. These individual cases are not part of a federally organized crackdown. Typically, these online commentators offended local officials. Examples include Savva Terentyev, a Syktyvkar resident, who faces charges filed August 9 under Article 282 of the criminal code, inciting hatred or enmity and humiliating a person's dignity, with a maximum sentence of two years for denouncing the local police in explicit language, calling for them to be burned in a public square. Terentyev was angered because the police had removed computers from the office of *Iskra*, a local opposition newspaper, and found pirated software on them.

Because of its location in the volatile Caucasus, the federal government seems to be playing a greater role in the campaign against Ingushetiya.ru, which publishes frequent articles critical of the corruption and poor management of Ingushetia's leaders. Ingushetia's president, Murat Zyazikov, ordered two local Internet providers to block access to the opposition Web site Ingushetiya.ru, though they refused to implement the order. In October, the Russian procurator general reopened a 1999 case against the site's owner, Magomed Yevloyev. The site is also being investigated for inciting ethnic hatred. The authorities closed it in December, but it was able to resume operations within a few days.[47] Just before the end of the year, it conducted an investigation of the State Duma elections in the region, gathering data to show that the authorities had inflated turnout figures, and again courting official ire.[48]

The authorities have also cracked down on foreign broadcasters trying to reach a Russian audience. They removed the BBC from the FM dial in August as part of a dispute with the United Kingdom over the murder of former FSB agent Aleksandr Litvinenko in London. Additionally, the authorities have been pushing local partners of the U.S. government-funded Radio Liberty to drop its programming from their schedules.

At least 14 journalists have been slain for their work in Russia since 2000, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The killings remain unsolved. The authorities have made several arrests in the case of Anna Politkovskaya, including that of a member of the FSB, but have not identified the person or group that ordered the assassination, and Prosecutor General Yury Chaika continues to insist on the theory that the shooting was organized abroad in order to discredit Russia's leaders. The authorities also closed the investigation into the March death of *Kommersant* military correspondent Igor Safronov, claiming that his fall from his Moscow apartment building window was a suicide. Safronov's colleagues believe that the investigators never really examined the theory that he was killed because of his work. Additionally, the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor General's office has reopened the case of Yury Shchekochikhin, a Duma member and *Novaya Gazeta* journalist who investigated corruption, to see if he had been intentionally poisoned with radiation when he died in 2003. He apparently lost all of his hair before his death, which went unexplained at the time. The medical tests and

autopsy results were sealed as "medical secrets."[49] In one sign of progress, a court in Tatarstan convicted five individuals for the murder of *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Igor Domnikov. This was the first case to hold people responsible for a journalist's murder during Putin's tenure. However, the authorities have yet to identify who ordered the assassination, having so far prosecuted only the people who carried it out.

This year, the Russian authorities shut down the Educated Media Foundation (EMF), the Russian legal successor to Internews, which had provided training for more than 15,000 broadcast journalists since 1992. The EMF suspended its work following a raid in April 2007 on its Moscow headquarters in which police seized numerous financial documents and computer servers. The search was ostensibly part of a criminal investigation of EMF president Manana Aslamazyan, who violated Russian law by failing to declare that she had slightly more than US$10,000 in cash when she returned from a trip abroad. Usually, the penalty for such transgressions is a fine, not closing down an entire organization.

Aslamazyan fled abroad, joining other journalists who felt it was too dangerous to work in Russia. The United States accepted as political refugees journalists Fatima Tlisova and Yury Bagrov. Both had run afoul of the Russian authorities for their reporting on the North Caucasus, including coverage of soldiers' abuses in Chechnya.

Despite the restrictions on free speech in the media market, spending on advertising is continuing to increase at a rapid pace. In 2007, the Group M advertising company expected media advertising sales to increase more than 25 percent to US$8.5 billion.[50] Advertising purchases on the Internet were also growing rapidly and expected to be up more than 75 percent in 2007, to US$330 million.

Local Democratic Governance

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75

While Russian law provides for regional and local government, Putin's policies of centralization have meant that subnational government has lost power and resources to the federal center since 2000. Regional and local officials complain that important funding sources have increasingly flowed from local control to Moscow. Local government reforms, adopted in 2003 and set to be implemented by 2006, were ultimately postponed until 2009, well after the 2007–2008 electoral cycle.

Putin took the power to appoint governors in September 2004, abolishing the Yeltsin-initiated practice of allowing them to stand for direct election. Initially, the president mainly used his new power to reappoint incumbents, largely continuing his tradition of leaving the elite intact. However, as the elections approached in 2007, he began replacing some key governors from the Yeltsin era, including Novgorod's Mikhail Prusak and Samara's Konstantin Titov, with people who will

be unreservedly loyal to the Kremlin. Putin also replaced the governor of Sakhalin oblast with Alexander Khoroshavin, who is close to the head of the state-owned energy company Rosneft, which now has lucrative contracts in the area. The changes seem to be part of the general plan to extend federal control farther into the regions, particularly ensuring victory in the elections and continuing to demonstrate Putin's overwhelming dominance.

The governors had not made a serious challenge to Putin's power when they were directly elected between 2000 and 2004. Under the new system, the governors have become more dependent on Moscow but have gained greater power vis-à-vis regional legislatures and the local governments in their jurisdictions. They are no longer accountable to the population in their constituency, depending instead on the president's favor to remain in office. Ironically, the governors also have greater abilities now to lobby for resources in the presidential administration since they are in fact a part of that administration, according to an analysis by Oklahoma University's Paul Goode.[51]

At the bottom of the "hierarchy of power," mayors have little power and little access to funding. They hope to use the federal government as a lever against the governors who stand above them and often control all of the local financial assets, but they have little access to Putin and the highest levels of the federal government.

The federal authorities used their coercive and law enforcement capacities to bring unruly mayors into line in the run-up to the 2007 elections. Yakutsk mayor Ilya Mikhalchuk resigned unexpectedly on September 10; Vologda mayor Aleksei Yakunichev faced criminal charges for abuse of power and taking bribes; while Arkhangelsk mayor Aleksandr Donskoi was convicted of forging a diploma and engaging in illegal commercial activity, according to reports summarized by Radio Liberty. All of these local officials had come into conflict with federal or regional authorities. For example, Donskoi angered his superiors when in 2006 he announced plans to run for president.

In some places, the Kremlin does not have the authority to remove regional leaders because their local power bases are too strong and therefore must compromise with them. Tatarstan is a case in point. After ending the Yeltsin-era practice of signing power-sharing treaties with the Russian regions and abolishing those treaties, the Putin administration in 2007 reversed its past practices and signed such a treaty with Tatarstan. Critics pointed out that the 10-year treaty gives Tatarstan special status among Russian regions and violated both the Russian and Tatarstan Constitutions because it requires that the president of Tatarstan speak both Russian and Tatar. The Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian Parliament, had initially refused to ratify the treaty, fearing that other regions would begin to demand similar treaties for themselves.

The North Caucasus continues to present the greatest difficulties for local government in Russia. In Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov was inaugurated as president on April 5. He has long headed a variety of armed groups that international observers have linked to numerous assassinations, incidents of torture, and myriad other crimes. Since taking office, he has worked hard to secure his personal power, reduce

Moscow's reach into the region, and increase his access to resources. A referendum held on December 2 extended his term from five to seven years, increased parliamentarians' terms from four to five years, established a unicameral Parliament with 41 members, added Chechen as a state language, and allowed the Parliament to adopt future constitutional amendments without direct popular input.

Although active fighting in Chechnya has come to an end and there has been some progress in the rebuilding effort, Kadyrov's leadership remains extremely problematic. He is inspiring a cult of personality, and it is not clear that he has given up violence in pursuit of his goals. Corruption is pervasive, particularly among officials helping citizens secure restitution for property they lost during the fighting.[52] In September, Kadyrov ordered female civil servants to wear head scarves on the threat that they would otherwise lose their jobs. Russian law separates religion and state and guarantees equality to both sexes. Earlier, Kadyrov had ordered all NGOs working in Chechnya to move their headquarters there, but the organizations pointed out that he had no legal basis for doing this and ignored the demand.

In contrast with the relatively peaceful Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan today are characterized by extensive violence. Numerous assassinations, kidnappings, and other crimes are committed in both republics on a daily basis. Amnesty International reported that law enforcement agents had carried out executions in Nazran, Malgobek, and Karabulak.[53] There is now a loose network of autonomous violent groups, operating in Ingushetia, Dagestan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, and Kabardino-Balkaria.[54]

Judicial Framework and Independence

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
4.25	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.75	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25

Numerous problems remain in the exercise of Russian justice. Above all, the courts remain subject to political caprice and can be reliably counted on to serve political goals when required to do so. Chief Arbitration Justice Anton Ivanov has complained that executive branch bodies intervene in judicial matters that affect their interests.[55] The authorities are moving ahead with plans to move the Constitutional Court to St. Petersburg in May 2008, likely reducing its influence.[56] Additionally, there are numerous problems with lengthy pre-trial detentions, court cases that drag on too long, and a frequent failure to implement court decisions—problems that are not unique to Russia.[57]

Thanks to continuing reform efforts, there are three positive developments in the Russian judicial system, though these developments often reveal the depth of the problems the court system still faces. First, there are more opportunities to bring abuses to the attention of judges, though the nature of the response naturally then depends on the professionalism of the judge. A judge must make decisions on

pre-trial detention, which judges frequently use. Currently, a person who is arrested must see a judge within 48 hours. Under the old system, it could have been many months before an arrested person saw a judge. Most judges are from the prosecutor's office or the police and are very conservative. Nevertheless, if a defendant becomes a victim of torture as the police try to extract information or a confession from him, he has the opportunity to show his wounds to the judge, who may or may not take action in regard to this evidence. Such a provision makes torturing prisoners more difficult, though it is far from abolishing such practices. Despite these reforms, many people spend considerable time in pre-trial detention.

Second, Article 125 of the criminal procedure code (adopted in 2001, with numerous subsequent amendments) allows the defendant to complain to the judge about the actions or inactions of the investigators and prosecutor working on his case. This provision is useful because it gives the defendant a chance at the very beginning of the case to say that the prosecutor is not working fairly. Allowing the defendant to struggle against the charges against him from the beginning often makes a big difference in the outcome of the case. A good defense attorney will start this process as soon as possible.

A third improvement is the possibility of having a jury trial. Despite considerable attention given to this possibility, less than 2 percent of trials are eligible for juries since juries hear only serious charges. In fact, sometimes prosecutors deliberately reduce charges so there is no chance for a jury trial. Such trials offer a greater likelihood for acquittal, though higher courts can overturn juries' decisions as many times as necessary to obtain the "correct" decision.

Part of the problem in improving the functioning of the justice system is that the quality of the defense remains extremely poor in Russia and may even be deteriorating. Often the defense attorney is not prepared because he has not seen the case file or has not visited the prisoner in custody. Some even confuse the defendant's name during the trial. According to the Russian Constitution, defendants are entitled to free legal representation. But the bar association is supposed to provide these free lawyers, and it does not have the resources to do so. Not surprisingly, defense lawyers have extremely low salaries and are often overworked. Additionally, many started their careers in the prosecutor's office or the police and lack a basic understanding of the duties of a lawyer, nor do they want to defend people they believe are guilty.[58]

Perhaps the greatest indictment of the Russian court system is the large number of people who appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg because they believe they cannot get a fair trial in Russia.[59] Russia is bound by the ECHR's decisions since it incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into its 1993 Constitution. More Russian citizens file cases with the ECHR than any other country in the Council of Europe. The ECHR's documents show that as of January 1, 2007, of some 90,000 cases pending before the Court, approximately 20,000 originated in Russia. More than 10,500 applications were logged in 2006 alone, double the 2003 figures and an increase of more than 400 percent over 2000.[60] Unfortunately, rather than address the problems causing

citizens to appeal to the ECHR, the Russian authorities are looking for ways to limit Russian citizens' access to it. Such steps, including a proposal by Constitutional Court chairman Valery Zorkin, have gone nowhere because they would violate Russia's international obligations.

While the Russian authorities always pay the penalties assessed in individual cases, they rarely make structural changes to address the underlying issues in each case. In 2007, the ECHR made several rulings against Russian actions in Chechnya, including a determination that state agents had "extrajudicially executed" Zura Bitiyeva, a local human rights activist in Chechnya, along with three others in her home after she had appealed to the ECHR. The case was the first in which someone had apparently been slain for appealing to the ECHR. In July, the ECHR ruled that Russian soldiers had killed 50 civilians in the Chechen village of Novye Aldy in 2000 and ordered the government to pay US$200,000 to relatives of the deceased.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that conditions are deteriorating in Russian prisons.[61] The number of prison inmates in Russia reached 890,000 in the first half of 2007, according to the Federal Penitentiary Service Web site, the highest figure in five years.[62] The system has "slipped away from public, and even law enforcement, control almost entirely and increasingly bears the hallmarks of a repressive camp system of the totalitarian type," according to For Human Rights executive director Lev Ponomarev's analysis.[63] He argues that "those who find themselves remanded to a pre-trial detention center (SIZO) likely will be subjected to torturous conditions in overcrowded facilities, where there is a very real risk of contracting tuberculosis, HIV, hepatitis, or some other dangerous disease with far less than adequate medical care."

Corruption

1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
6.25	6.25	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00

Russia lacks a coherent strategy to combat corruption. Putin has openly admitted that he has made little progress in this area, and Medvedev has declared that he will make the issue a priority. Nevertheless, in practice, few groups in society are interested in fighting corruption. The failure of both state and society to address the problem means that the situation is getting worse. In Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index, Russia was ranked 143 out of 180 countries, with an absolute score of 2.3 on the 0–10 scale, where 10 is the best possible score (perceived as least corrupt).[64] This is a drop from 2006, when Russia had a 2.5 score. Anticorruption campaigns in Russia are mostly attempts to discredit political opponents. An effective effort against this scourge would require a free media and a vibrant civil society that included many watchdog groups exercising oversight over public officials.

Russia faces many problems. Bribery is part of the culture now because as much as 40 percent of Russians see it as a useful way to solve problems, according to a poll conducted by the Levada Center in October.[65] About one-quarter of all money allocated for state purchases is stolen each year, according to a study by the National Association of Electronic Traders and the NGO Against Corruption. Many members of the organized crime groups prominent in the 1990s have now moved into business, where they often continue to function according to the old rules. Additionally, there is extensive corruption throughout Russia's law enforcement agencies. This problem used to apply mainly to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but now an increasing number of criminal cases are being filed against employees of the FSB and the Office of the Procurator General.[66] While some evidence suggests that low-level corruption is decreasing, corruption at the highest levels of the political system and business is increasing, according to former economics minister Yevgeny Yasin.[67]

Part of the problem is a growing bureaucracy. When Putin came to power, Russia had approximately 1.14 million public officials—slightly fewer than were employed at the end of the Soviet era. In 2004, when administrative reform was launched, one of its main slogans was "Fewer bureaucrats!" As a result, according to Russia's Federal Statistics Service (Rosstat), perversely there are now almost 1.6 million officials in Russia,[68] plus approximately 3 million so-called *siloviki*—policemen, soldiers, and law enforcement and security agents.[69] Bureaucrats' salaries are increasing with their numbers: They were up 22.9 percent in the first six months of 2007, reaching an average of 23,029 rubles (approximately US$925) a month, according to Rosstat.[70] These higher salaries have apparently not made an impact on bribe taking.

Government efforts to address the problem have gone nowhere. In February 2007, an interdepartmental anticorruption working group, chaired by presidential aide Viktor Ivanov, was established. The group is supposed to amend current legislation in accordance with the UN and Council of Europe anticorruption conventions and define the functions and powers of a special anticorruption body. The group will also design mechanisms for requiring mandatory declarations of assets, preventing the legalization of criminal income, and avoiding conflicts of interest by public officials. The task group was supposed to come up with its proposals by August 1, 2007.[71] However, on August 14, President Putin moved the deadline to July 1, 2008.[72]

The appointment of the Viktor Zubkov government has raised concerns about the current extent of nepotism in Russian politics. Putin refused to accept the resignation of Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov after his father-in-law was appointed prime minister. There are many such family ties at federal and regional levels in Russia.[73] Federal Security Service Director Nikolai Patrushev's elder son handles loans to oil companies at Vneshtorgbank, while his younger son advises Rosneft chairman Igor Sechin.

Conditions for corruption seem to be proliferating. During the year, the authorities created several state corporations that have the ability to spend from the

public budget with little oversight.[74] These noncommercial state entities include RosNanoTech, the Development Bank, and Dmitry Medvedev's Housing and Communal Services Reform Fund. They are not subject to the usual audit by the tax authorities or law enforcement. RosNanoTech will be directly subordinate to the president and cabinet and accountable only to them.

There is also a flagrant use of Russia's political institutions for provocative purposes. In one of the most pugnacious cases, the Liberal Democrats' list included Andrei Lugovoy, accused by the United Kingdom of murdering Aleksandr Litvinenko with polonium. Since the LDPR successfully crossed the 7 percent barrier, Lugovoy gained a seat in Parliament and immunity from prosecution.

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