

1. Political system and governance

1.1. Political developments

Russia has an authoritarian political system, with power heavily ‘concentrated in the hands of President Vladimir Putin’, who was re-elected in March 2024[4] with over 87 % of the vote.[5] The election was widely criticised amid widespread censorship, lack of opposition candidates, and electoral fraud.[6] Constitutional changes adopted in 2020 allow Vladimir Putin to seek two additional consecutive terms, potentially extending his presidency to 2036.[7]

Russia has a multiparty system, but opposition parties are tightly controlled by the Kremlin and do not present a credible challenge to the ruling government.[8]Russia’s parliament, the Federal Assembly, consists of two chambers, the Council of the Federation (upper chamber) and the State Duma (lower chamber).[9] In the 2021 State Duma elections, the ruling United Russia party won 324[10]out of 450 seats,[11] despite numerous reports of voting violations.[12]In the local elections held between 12 and 14 September 2025, determining over 45 000 seats across the country, ‘including 19 governorships, 11 regional legislatures, and 25 city councils,’ candidates from United Russia won the majority of the vote.[13]

As noted by Freedom House, Russia’s leadership uses security agencies to enforce tight societal control and suppress opposition to the regime and relies on loyal business elites, which allows President Putin and his allies in the security and business sectors to control parliamentary decision-making.[14]Reporters Without Borders (RSF) noted that, since the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, President Putin has become ‘increasingly isolated’ and is surrounded by ‘a small inner circle.’ According to RSF, traditional decision-making bodies, such as the Security Council, have lost their influence, while the Parliament largely functions to legitimise Kremlin decisions or to display loyalty through repressive legislation.[15]

The opposition in Russia has been severely weakened as the leaders of the opposition have been imprisoned, killed, or forced into exile, while supporters of the opposition inside the country have either left the country for safety reasons or stopped public criticism of the government due to fear of arrest.[16]Following the death of opposition leader Alexey Navalny in February 2024 while serving a 19-year sentence in an Arctic penal colony,[17] Russia’s opposition has faced significant setbacks.[18] Opposition groups abroad are divided[19]and lack a clear

strategy,20 common goals, and political legitimacy,21 frequently engaging in mutual accusations and competing for influence.22

Since the beginning of 2024, the Kremlin has sought to promote persons who participated in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine into a new elite23through the federal level24management programme 'Time of Heroes'.25As of June 2025, 45 of the first 83 selected applicants were reportedly appointed to various posts.26 In total, the programme received over 60 000 applications.27 As noted by researcher Miłosz Bartosiewicz28 in October 2025, the positions allocated to the graduates of the programme 'have largely been at the regional or local level' and carry limited authority and influence.29

In a September 2025 report on the human rights situation in Russia, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, noted that the Russian authorities rely on 'a consolidated ideology centred on "traditional" values and external threats' which is 'used to justify aggression abroad and repression at home.'30This ideology is supported by the Russian Orthodox Church31 and is spread through state-controlled media32 and public education.33As noted by Amnesty International (AI), patriotic indoctrination intensified in 2024, notably through mandatory 'Conversations about important things' classes in schools, first introduced in 2022.34 Pro-war and patriotic content has also been made compulsory in universities,35including through a mandatory 'Foundations of Russian Statehood' course, developed by the presidential administration and introduced in 2023.36 The course on 'Conversation about important things' was also reportedly introduced in kindergartens on 1 September 2025.37

As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur, the spread of state-sponsored 'nationalist ideology' has led to the normalisation of 'identity-based discrimination and violence' against women and girls, LGBTIQ persons, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, and migrants. At the same time, the state uses the narrative of enemies inside and outside the country 'to justify and reinforce broader repression,' while diverting attention 'from the war on Ukraine and government corruption.'38

Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe on 16 March 2022, which it had joined in 1996. 39On 16 September 2022, Russia ceased to be party to the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) remains competent to examine applications against Russia concerning actions or omissions that occurred up to that date.40On 29 September 2025, President Putin signed the law on Russia's withdrawal from the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. 41

- 4

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 5

  Election Guide, Russian Federation, 8 April 2024, url

- 6

  Zavadskaya, M., Russia’s presidential election: Signalling repression and demobilizing opposition, FIIA, May 2024, url

- 7

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 8

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 9

  IPU Parline, Russian Federation, n.d., url

- 10

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 11

  IPU Parline, Russian Federation, n.d., url

- 12

  DW, Reports of voting violations mar Russia elections, 18 September 2021, url; Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 13

  Moscow Times (The), Pro-Kremlin Incumbents Sweep to Victory in Russia’s Regional Elections, 15 September 2025, url

- 14

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 15

  RSF, Russia, n.d., url

- 16

  RFE/RL, 3 Years In: How Moscow’s War In Ukraine Has Reshaped Life in Russia, 23 February 2025, url

- 17

AP, Russian journalist sentenced to 12 years over ties to opposition group, 29 July 2025, url

- 18

  AP, A year after Navalny’s death, the Russian opposition struggles without its charismatic leader, 16 February 2025, url

- 19

  Meduza, ‘Nothing good will come of this’. Three years into the full-scale war, Russia’s exiled opposition is in crisis – leaving anti-war Russians feeling disillusioned and unrepresented, 12 February 2025, url; AP, A year after Navalny’s death, the Russian opposition struggles without its charismatic leader, 16 February 2025, url; RFE/RL, Who’s Who in The Fractured Russian Opposition Fighting Against Putin, 9 October 2025, url

- 20

  AP, A year after Navalny’s death, the Russian opposition struggles without its charismatic leader, 16 February 2025, url; Ponomarev, I., Russia Future Watch – I. Russian Opposition and Russian Resistance: The Landscape Before the Battle for Power, The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, 30 May 2025, url

- 21

  Ponomarev, I., Russia Future Watch – I. Russian Opposition and Russian Resistance: The Landscape Before the Battle for Power, The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, 30 May 2025, url

- 22

  AP, A year after Navalny’s death, the Russian opposition struggles without its charismatic leader, 16 February 2025, url

- 23

  Bartosiewicz, M., Regional elites in wartime Russia, OSW, 3 0ctober 2025, url

- 24

  ISW, Russian Force Generation And Technological Adaptations Update June 18, 2025, 18 June 2025, url

- 25

  Russia, Vysshaya shkola gosudarstvennogo upravleniya, Vremya Geroev [The Time of Heroes], n.d., url; Bartosiewicz, M., Regional elites in wartime Russia, OSW, 3 0ctober 2025, url

- 26

ISW, Russian Force Generation And Technological Adaptations Update June 18, 2025, 18 June 2025, url

- 27

ISW, Russian Force Generation And Technological Adaptations Update June 18, 2025, 18 June 2025, url; Bartosiewicz, M., Regional elites in wartime Russia, OSW, 3 0ctober 2025, url

- 28

Miłosz Bartosiewicz is a research fellow at the Russian Department of the Poland-based Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), whose research interests include Russia's regional politics. See, OSW, Miłosz Bartosiewicz, n.d., url

- 29

Bartosiewicz, M., Regional elites in wartime Russia, OSW, 3 0ctober 2025, url

- 30

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, 15 September 2025, url, para. 64

- 31

Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 28 February 2025, url

- 32

RSF, Russia, n.d., url; UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, 15 September 2025, url, para. 4

- 33

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, 15 September 2025, url, para. 4

- 34

RFE/RL, 3 Years In: How Moscow's War In Ukraine Has Reshaped Life in Russia, 23 February 2025, url

- 35

UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana

Katzarova, 15 September 2025, url, para. 65

- 36

  Kortukov, D. and Waller J. G., 'The DNA of Russia': Ideology and Patriotic Education in Wartime Russia, Russia.Post, 30 October 2024, url

- 37

  Insider (The), Brainwashing 101: How state propaganda hijacked Russian education, 22 October 2025, url

- 38

  UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova,15 September 2025, url, para. 3

- 39

  COE, The Russian Federation is excluded from the Council of Europe, 16 March 2022, url

- 40

  COE, Russia ceases to be party to the European Convention on Human Rights, 16 September 2022, url

- 41

  EEAS, Russia: Statement by the spokesperson on the withdrawal from the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 30 September 2025, url

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu