

## Eurasia

Eurasia's scores have long ranked among the worst in *Freedom in the World*, and its political rights indicators are the worst of any region. Election rigging is rampant, media censorship is common, judiciaries are under political control, and religious belief is subject to state direction. The region includes three of the worst-rated countries, as well as Russia, a global leader among modern authoritarian regimes.

### Russia Puts Pressure on Neighbors, Sparking Unrest in Ukraine

A signal development during 2013 was Russia's use of bullying tactics—especially punitive trade restrictions—to discourage smaller states in the region from going through with Association Agreements with the European Union. Threats, table thumping, and the promise of tenuous rewards were enough to persuade Armenia to scuttle its plans for closer EU integration and join a Russian-led customs union instead. In contrast, Georgia and Moldova, which boast Eurasia's best rankings on the *Freedom in the World* scale, resisted Russian pressure and initialed the EU pacts as scheduled.

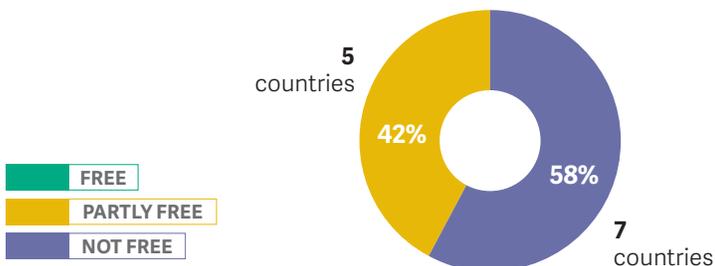
In dealing with Ukraine, Russia first employed threats of economic retaliation and then offered a major loan and energy-price deal to convince President Viktor Yanukovich to abandon the EU agreement. Yanukovich's actions came after months of pledges to sign the pact, and the betrayal triggered ongoing, mammoth street

protests in Kyiv by Ukrainians demanding a European and democratic orientation for their country. The government's handling of the crisis, which included an increase in media controls and violence against journalists, led to declines in Ukraine's *Freedom in the World* score.

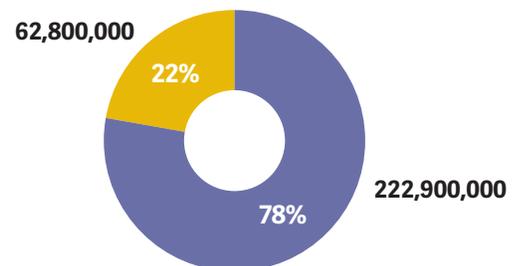
### Putin Cracks Down before Sochi

As Russia prepared for the Winter Olympics in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi—and the increased scrutiny that such an event will bring—the government stepped up persecution of political dissidents and vulnerable members of the population in 2013, leading to a downward trend arrow in *Freedom in the World*. The parliament adopted a measure in June that outlaws "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations," triggering violence, job dismissals, and venomous verbal attacks against LGBT people by parliamentarians and other public figures. Migrant laborers from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and East Asia were subject to an increase in arbitrary detentions and abuse. The authorities brought spurious criminal charges against protesters

#### STATUS BY COUNTRY



#### STATUS BY POPULATION



Total population: 285,700,000

and opposition leaders, including anticorruption activist Aleksey Navalny, and convicted a dead man—corruption whistleblower Sergey Magnitsky—of tax evasion in an absurd bid to discredit him. In the media sphere, the Putin regime, which already dominates the national television market, folded the respected state-run news agency RIA Novosti into a consolidated media entity, Russia Today, that is likely to be more aggressively propagandistic.

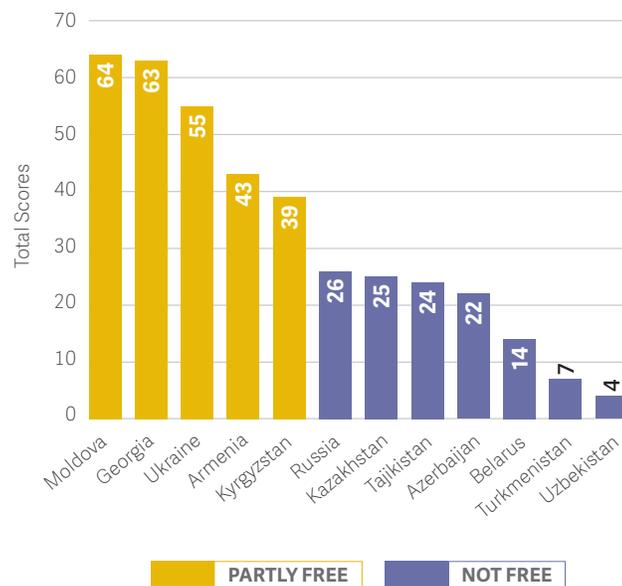
The Kremlin was able to divert attention from this internal repression through a series of opportunistic maneuvers by Putin, such as brokering the Syrian chemical weapons agreement and granting political asylum to former American intelligence contractor Edward Snowden. In another apparent bid to deflect criticism, in December the government released a series of high-profile political prisoners, including dissident businessman Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who had been behind bars for 10 years, and members of the protest group Pussy Riot. However, these releases were seen as cosmetic moves that did not herald any fundamental reforms.

### Other Authoritarian Regimes Step Up Repression

Like Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have continued to intensify domestic repression while largely escaping international opprobrium due to their natural gas and oil wealth. Azerbaijan received a civil liberties rating decline from 5 to 6 due to blatant property rights violations by the government. The country also suffered a crackdown on civil society and the media in the run-up to the October presidential election, which was widely regarded as neither free nor fair. Kazakhstan received a downward trend

### TOTAL SCORES

100 = best score  
0 = worst score



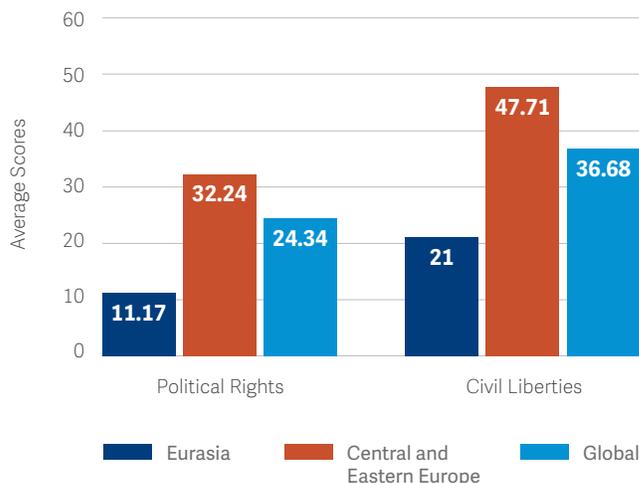
arrow due to broad extralegal enforcement of its already strict 2011 law on religious activity, with raids by antiterrorism police on gatherings in private homes.

Meanwhile, deplorable conditions in Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan continued to earn those countries a place on Freedom House's "Worst of the Worst" list of the world's most repressive societies.

### Progress in the Caucasus

Georgia was one of the few bright spots in Eurasia in 2013, with its score improving thanks to an open and less polarized campaign environment and a free and fair presidential election in October. While there are still concerns about selective prosecutions of officials from former president Mikheil Saakashvili's government, most signs suggest a strengthening of democratic institutions by the Georgian Dream government over the past year. A February presidential election in Armenia was less successful, with observers noting numerous irregularities, but the country's score registered a slight improvement due to increased space for opposition parties to campaign.

### POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES AVERAGE SCORES



Freedom House is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that supports democratic change, monitors freedom, and advocates for democracy and human rights.

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