

# RUSSIA

## Concerns in ZAR Case

Research Unit

USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

August 2021



# Presentation Roadmap

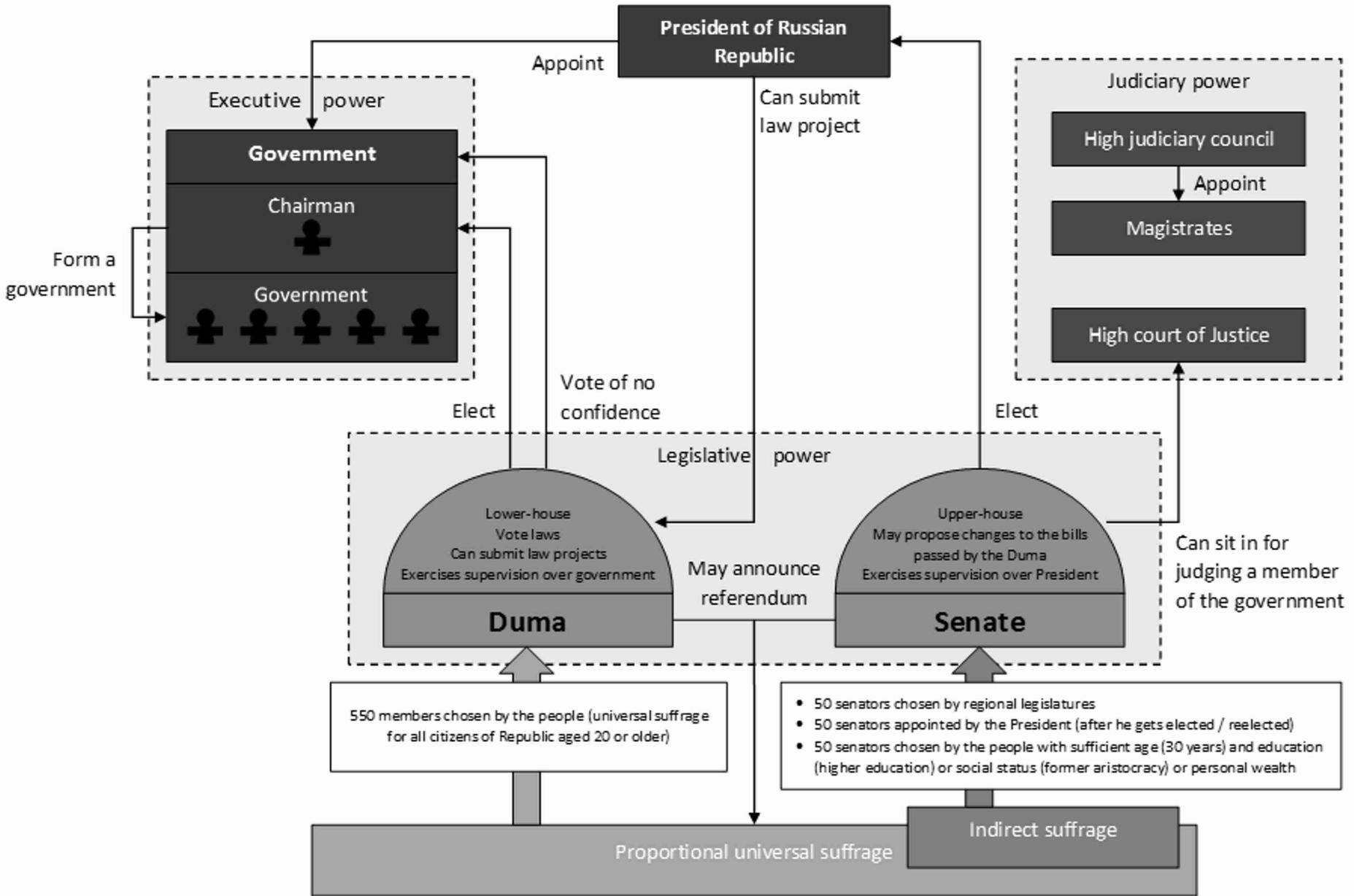
- Context
- Military and Government
- Political Repression
- LGBTI Concerns & HIV
- Ethnic Minorities
- Religious Freedom (Jehovah's Witnesses)
- Organized Crime
- Documents
- Resources

# The Breakup of the Soviet Union, 1991





РОССИЙСКАЯ  
ФЕДЕРАЦИЯ



# Climate of Repression

- September 2021 State Duma elections are high stakes for the ruling United Russia party. Repression of civil society, political opposition, and independent media is intensifying in advance.
- Late 2020, unprecedented raft of repressive laws targeting dissent and peaceful assembly (Expansion of "foreign agent" laws and "undesirable foreign organizations").
- The poisoning, arrest, and sentencing of Aleksey Navalny, and harassment & prosecution of his supporters, has sent a further signal of the Kremlin's willingness to take extreme steps to silence opposition.
- Actions against LGBTI people and religious minorities.

# Russian Military

- Transition from Soviet Union beginning 1991
- 1991 Belavezha Accords agreed by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), had its own supreme military commander until end of 1993
- March 1992 Yelstin established Armed Forces of Russian Federation – had over 2 million soldiers, most of old Soviet military under Moscow
- As of 1996, 670,000 officers and enlisted; shortfall and officer-heavy, trying to survive
- Attempt to transition to more modern force

### Conscript and Contract Serviceman Ranks

	Field Uniform	Duty Uniform			
		Ground Forces	Aerospace Defense Forces	Navy	
Senior Warrant Officer					Senior Warrant Officer
Warrant Officer					Warrant Officer
Starshina					Petty Officer of the Ship
Senior Sergeant					Senior Petty Officer
Sergeant					Petty Officer 1st Class
Junior Sergeant					Petty Officer 2nd Class
Private First Class					Senior Sailor
Private					Sailor

	Field Uniform	Officer Ranks		
		Ground Forces	Aerospace Defense Forces	Navy
Marshal of the Russian Federation				
General of the Army				
Colonel General				
Lieutenant General				
Major General				
Colonel				
Lieutenant Colonel				
Major				
Captain				
Senior Lieutenant				
Lieutenant				
Junior Lieutenant				

# Russia Mandatory Service

- Unchanged from USSR for several years
- 1998 law (with 2008 amendments) reduced term of service to one year
- Every male citizen entered in military registry at age 17 - determination made regarding potential non-medical exemption from service
- At age 18, conscription proceedings including a medical examination
- Window for potential service lasts until age 27
- Conscripts assigned responsibilities based on skills and abilities; “science companies” were established in 2013 as a new way to utilize conscripts with technical skills.

# Russia Mandatory Service

## Exemptions:

- Previously completed military or alternative civilian service
- Medical board determined unfit for military service (or fit for limited service)
- Father or blood brother has died in the course of military service
- Have academic degree or continuing education
- Currently serving criminal sentence, have an outstanding conviction, or under investigation
- Have multiple children

# Russia Mandatory Service

- In 2008 over half of all conscripts were listed as having some sort of health-related issue
- Reportedly healthy young men could obtain a medical exemption for about \$10,000 through established lawyers or by bribing doctors directly
- Many young men with legitimate health issues were unable to receive exemptions unless they were able to pay a substantial bribe
- To overcome the high levels of draft dodging, the government has at times forcibly taken young men to military enlistment offices to immediately send them to a base through the draft.

# Soviet and Russian Military Hazing

- Hazing (*Dedovshchina*) widely reported
- Brutalization of junior conscripts by more senior conscripts serving their last year of compulsory military service, as well as NCOs and officers
- A variety of subordinating or humiliating activities from doing the chores of the senior ranks to violent and sometimes lethal physical, sexual, and psychological abuse
- Cited as a major source of poor morale in the armed forces, but reportedly decreasing.

# Russian Military Operations (1991-)

- **Moldova**: 1992, 14<sup>th</sup> Army supported rebels with artillery barrages and weapons transfers
- **Tajikistan**: 1992-97, 201<sup>st</sup> Motor Rifle Division sided with Soviet-era regime against minority ethnic groups and Islamic extremists, led military operations
- **First Chechen War**: 1994-96, attempt by Chechnya to secede, 23,700 Russia troops later reinforced by 30,000, massive air and artillery bombardment killed ~35,000 civilians; largely considered defeat of Russian troops
- **Yugoslavia/Kosovo**: 1992-1999, Russian involvement in peacekeeping, tension but no glaring red flags

# Russian Military Operations (1991-)

- **Second Chechen War**: 1999-2002, Putin making statement after defeat in first Chechen War; 50,000 regular troops and 40,000 security troops from Ministry of Internal Affairs, up to 50,000 civilians killed; clashes have continued in North Caucasus (Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria) and service there should be explored
- **Abkhazia and South Ossetia**: 2008, support of separatists
- **Insurgency in the North Caucasus**: 2009–2017
- **Ukraine**: 2014 - present
- **Syria**: Sept. 2015 – present: military support for Al Assad regime; air strikes, civilian deaths

# Russian Military: Resources

- Organization of Russian Forces (1991-1996): Library of Congress Country Study, pp.524-41
- The Russian Way of War, Foreign Military Studies Office, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command G2, 2016.

# Russian Intelligence

- The “Main Intelligence Directorate” (GRU) (aka *Glavnoye razvedochnoye upravleniye*) persists as military division
- KGB officially dissolved in December 1991, replaced by five successors including the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Federal Border Service and Border Security
- Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) tasked with intelligence and espionage activities abroad, but much smaller than GRU

# Russian Intelligence

## Federal Security Service (FSB)

- *Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti*
- KGB > Min. of Security (MB) > Fed. Counterintelligence Service (FSK) 1994 > FSB 1995
- Investigative authority fully restored by law (new KGB?)
- Controls Russia's 14 investigative detention prisons and several special troop detachments
- Authorized to conduct intelligence operations within Russia and abroad for the purpose of "enhancing the economic, scientific-technical and defense potential" of Russia
- FSB intelligence operations abroad are carried out in collaboration with the Foreign Intelligence Service

# Russian Intelligence

## Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information (FAPSI)

- *Federal'noye agentstvo pravitel'stvennykh svyazi i informatsii*
- Government communications and cipher systems
- Significant technical capabilities for monitoring communications and gathering intelligence
- 1993 Law on Federal Organs of Government Communications and Information criticized as giving the agency a monopoly over government communications and information, and permitting unwarranted interference in the communications networks of private banks and firms.

# Russian Intelligence

## Federal Border Service and Border Security

- Replaced the KGB's Border Troops Directorate
- National border security issues

## Main Guard Directorate (GUO)

- *Glavnoye upravleniye okhraneniya*
- Charged with guarding government leaders and key buildings and installations

# Russian Cyber Offensive Actors

- FSB has become increasingly involved in foreign operations, including cyber attacks
- GRU appears to be the most active group, with access to large amounts of resources to support its cyber operations
- SVR carries out mostly human intelligence and its cyber capabilities are not comparable to the FSB or GRU, but contributes

# Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)

## Regular police

- Known as *militsiya* (“militia”) until 2011, then *politsiya* (“police”)
- ~1,100,000 officers, including men and women
- Hierarchical organization up to Moscow with many divisions; network of local Internal Affairs Directorates (UVD) and some Main Internal Affairs Directorates (GUVD)
- Cities have “precinct Inspectors” who reside in large housing estates that double as police stations
- Low public trust

# Russian Security and Paramilitary

- By 1995, 382,500 security and paramilitary troops (one for every two military mobilizable personnel)
- Increased funding, numbers, and competence under Putin
- Pattern of numerous agencies having their own *Spetsnaz* force (“of special purpose”): e.g. anti-drug-trafficking mandate for MVD, FSB, Border Guards, Federal Narcotics Control Service

# Russian National Guard

- Internal military force created in 2016 (absorbed MVD Internal Troops, OMON, SOBR, others)
- Approximately 340,000 personnel in 84 units
- Reports directly to the President
- Separate from the Armed Forces
- Mission: secure borders, gun control, combat terrorism and organized crime, protect public order and guard important state facilities

# Russian National Guard: OMON

## OMON: Special Purpose Mobile Units

- *Omonovtsy*; “Black berets”
- Created in Soviet times (“Stormtroopers of repression”)
- Multiple roles:
  - Regular patrol officers
  - Public order and riot-control police (security at protests)
  - Armed-response paramilitaries
  - Counterinsurgency special forces
- Used in some combat operations such as *zachistka* (“clean up”) where a village is surrounded and house-to-house searches are conducted (human rights abuses and looting)

# Center for Combatting Extremism

- *Eshniki; Eshnik*
- Monitors groups and individuals for a wide range of activity considered undesirable (social media, protests)
- Gives information to other divisions for action (e.g. arresting protestors)
- Departments targeting political opposition, religious extremism, nationalist extremism, extremism at public events, economic activities of extremist organizations, banned groups and political parties that keep operating under a different name

*What is Center E?*, Meduza, Aug. 29, 2019

# Center for Combatting Extremism



# Center for Combatting Extremism



# Mass Communications and Media Monitoring

## *Roskomnadzor*

- Monitoring, controlling and censoring Russian mass media (including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter):
  - Electronic media
  - Mass communications
  - Information technology and telecommunications
  - Compliance with the law
  - Protecting the confidentiality of personal data being processed
  - Organizing the work of the radio-frequency service.

# Political Repression



# Political Repression

- Crackdown on political dissent (protests; Aleksey Navalny's poisoning, arrest, sentencing)
- Growing number of political prisoners (including for religious beliefs/practice) - now over 370
- Torture in prisons continuing concern
- Use of "anti-extremism" and other laws to suppress & punish free expression, association, assembly
- Overly restrictive laws on "foreign agents" and "undesirable foreign organizations" that are used for repressive purposes

# Political Repression: Rule of Law

- Major corruption and interference in the independence of both law enforcement and the judicial system; Judicial system sometimes used for political reprisals
- Impunity for corruption and abuses is pervasive in law enforcement and security forces
- Clandestine repatriation occasionally an issue, especially with other CIS states
- Transnational repression
  - Russia is one of the largest abusers of the Interpol Red Notice system, using it as a tool of political persecution
  - Both the government of Russia and the government of Chechnya have a track record of physically targeting enemies abroad (Litvinenko, Skripal, Khangoshvili, Aliyev, etc.)

# Political Repression: Police Practices

- Abuses most likely to occur within the first 48 hours of arrest, during pre-trial detention (denial of access to lawyer, torture or psychological pressure in order to extract confession, instructed to "sign this")
- Arbitrary arrest/detention is commonly reported in connection with demonstrations and single-person pickets
- Lengthy pre-trial detention periods are common (up to two months unless action is taken to extend)
- After an arrest, police typically take detainees to the nearest police station, where they should inform them of their rights. Police then prepare a protocol stating the grounds for the arrest, and both the detainee and police officer must sign it within three hours of detention.

# Political Repression: Police Practices

## Passports/Travel Bans?

- Reports of refusal to issue passport due to political activities
- Travel bans imposed on those charged over religious practices and human rights defenders/activists

## Required check-ins?

- If arrested and released with travel restrictions, must be renewed every 2 weeks and accused must appear and sign (attesting won't leave town/district)

# Political Repression: Torture

- Frequent reports of law enforcement officers using torture both to extract confessions and as a form of punishment, especially against detained opposition and human rights activists, journalists, and critics of government policies.
- Commonly used torture techniques are often designed to leave no trace, such as: use of electric shocks, beating on the soles of feet or on the kidneys, use of stress positions, holding head under water, suffocation, sleep deprivation.
- Reports of sexual abuse committed by government personnel.
- Between 2015 and 2018, only one criminal case was initiated for every 44 reports of violence perpetrated by Federal Penitentiary Service employees

# Political Repression: Freedom of Assembly

- Recent legislative changes:
  - Blocking transportation movement now a criminal offense
  - Foreign/anonymous funding for public events banned
  - Individuals can be charged for posting about unauthorized mass events on social media (and social networks now must block such content).
- Most of those detained during mass protests receive administrative charges, which can carry penalty of up to 15 days in jail.
- Increasingly, criminal charges brought in connection with mass demonstrations
  - ~100 criminal cases brought in relation to pro-Navalny protests in January 2021, most frequent charges were violence against an officer, violating health protocols, blocking roads
- This year's nationwide protests in support of Navalny – some of the largest in recent memory - met with mass detentions

# Political Repression: Online Surveillance

- Pervasive—Russian authorities have wide discretion and ability to conduct surveillance of citizens' online activities.
- The government uses the System for Operational Investigative Measures (SORM) for its online surveillance activities - enables police to track private email communications, identify internet users, and monitor their internet activity.
- Under current legislation, ISPs are required to install equipment that allows security services to monitor internet traffic.
- The law requires telecommunications providers to provide authorities with “backdoors” around encryption technologies

# Political Repression: Targeting

- Human rights activists and researchers, civil society organizers, journalists, whistleblowers, pro-democracy activists are frequently targeted for harassment and sometimes physical attack as a result of their work
- Repressive "foreign agent" or "undesirable foreign organization" laws sometimes applied to control or punish activities
- Political opposition (Team Navalny, but also other parties and independent candidates for office) and those working on especially sensitive issues (anti-corruption, election monitoring, LGBTI rights, etc.) are particularly at risk

# Political Repression: Targeting

- Human Rights defenders & political opposition may face:
  - Threats
  - Raids of homes or offices
  - Physical attacks (e.g. *Novaya gazeta* journalist who was beaten while conducting research)
  - Fabricated charges (drug possession, etc.) & imprisonment
  - Legal harassment ("foreign agent" laws, etc.)



Chechnya



# Political Repression: Chechnya

- All law enforcement/security organs in the Chechen Republic are directly subordinated to Ramzan Kadyrov (even regional branches of federal agencies, with the exception of the FSB)
- As a result, impunity for human rights abuses committed by Chechen officials is a major problem.
- There are no reliable accountability mechanisms. Rule of law even worse than in rest of Russia
- Those who are in danger in Chechnya are often not safe in other Russian regions (documented cases of abductions & forcible return to Chechnya)

# Political Repression: Chechnya

- Honor killings
  - Of women suspected of infidelity, perceived LGBTI persons
  - Sometimes at the encouragement of or with knowledge of Chechen authorities
- Targeting of LGBTI persons and dissidents
  - Abduction, torture, extrajudicial killings
- Domestic violence victims rarely get protection from authorities
- Targeting of Chechen dissidents living in Europe
  - Outspoken critics of Kadyrov are often not safe from reprisal even in Western Europe. There have been numerous targeted killings and attacks in recent years in Austria, France, Germany, Sweden.

# Political Repression: Chechnya

Helsinki Committee (2019):

“Once a persecuted Chechen appears in another region of Russia, he or she must register at his or her new place of residence. This registration may easily be known by authorities in Chechnya. It may prove next to impossible to stay under the radar of Chechen authorities even if you are living thousands of kilometres away from Groznyy.”

# LGBTI



# LGBTI

- Anti-LGBTI national ideology; “traditional values”; rights politicized
- Increased risk of violence and psychological abuse
- “Gay propaganda” law (2013): fines, impacted public opinion (cover for action if one is against); not consistently applied, not in FSB mandate - law has been used against LGBTI rights activists, artists whose work depicts same-sex couples, individuals distributing flyers, etc.
- “Foreign Agent” law used against LGBTI groups
- Discrimination in housing, employment, access to government services, with no legal protection

# LGBTI

- Street-level activists visited by police
- ILGA Europe: Activists may have more protection due to visibility and community
- Online activity is monitored (VK used by LGBTI groups)
- School expulsion due to subscribing to LGBTI group online

# LGBTI

- Online dating apps (e.g. Grindr) pose risk of fake dates, extortion, violence

(ILGA Europe: Not aware of government arranging fake dates)

- No government assistance; ~20% of victims report to police
- Relocation: Risk persists in all areas of Russia; migrants vulnerable



## Case Study:

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- LGBTI rights activist Yulia Tsvetkova was fined RUB75,000 (US\$1,014) for posting her drawings online in support of same-sex couples and faced other penalties, including ongoing prosecution for pornography relating to her body positive drawings featuring female genitalia
- Propaganda law used multiple times against her, faces up to 6 years in prison

# LGBTI

## Chechnya:

- 2017+ anti-gay pogroms
- Unlawful detentions in camp
- Murders, beatings, and torture in custody
- Violence to compel outing others
- Humiliation – forced confessions and mistreatment on video
- Encouragement of families to commit honor killings
- 2021: Reports of two gay men who fled to Moscow area after serious harms by Chechen authorities being return to Chechnya

# HIV

- 2018: Unlike most countries, Russia's HIV epidemic is growing, with the rate of new infections rising by between 10 and 15% each year. (>250 people become infected with HIV every day)
- The continued shift away from progressive policies towards socially conservative legislation is a barrier to implementing HIV prevention and treatment
- The ban on 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors' blocks HIV information and support services
- "Foreign Agent" law used against NGOs addressing HIV/AIDS
- Russia has the highest number of people who inject drugs in the region (1.8 million) - about 2.3% of the adult population

# HIV

- HIV treatment coverage for men who have sex with men is low
- A study involving around 1,300 Moscow-based men who have sex with men found HIV prevalence of 15.6%. Only 13% of those living with HIV knew their status, only 36% of whom were accessing treatment. Of those on treatment, 64% were virally suppressed

# HIV

- Stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV remain high - barrier to people most affected by HIV from accessing HIV prevention and treatment services they need
- 17-26% of those with HIV have access to antiretroviral therapy
- Private treatment is possible by expensive

# HIV

A 2010 survey by the People Living with HIV Stigma Index in Russia found:

- 72% of respondents had been subjected to gossip due to their HIV status.
- Around half (49%) had encountered insults, victimization or verbal threats
- Just under half (46%) had been subjected to physical violence

# Ethnic Minorities

Найбільші два народи регіонів Російської Федерації без урахування росіян (перепис 2010)

*The largest two nations regions of excluding Russians (Census 2010)*

Крупнейшие два народа регионов Российской Федерации без учета русских (перепись 2010)

*不包括俄罗斯最大的两个国家地区 (2010年人口普查)*

*Les deux plus grandes régions nations de l'exclusion des Russes (Recensement de 2010)*



# Ethnic Minorities

Minority Rights Group International has reports on 38 groups out of nearly 200:

<https://minorityrights.org/country/russian-federation/>

Minority groups at risk:

- Chechens, Ingush and others in North Caucasus
- Indigenous northern peoples
- Roma
- Jews

# Ethnic Minorities

## Research Unit Queries:

- Ethnic Koreans and East Asians in Russia  
(2021)
- Russian Minorities: Asian Descent, Buryat, Buddhist, Jurist (occupation) (2019)



# Religious Freedom

- Legislation criminalizes “extremism” without clear definition, used to prosecute nonviolent religious activity; recent laws on blasphemy, “stirring up religious hatred,” and “missionary activity.”
- Strict registration requirements and State monitoring
- Jehovah's Witnesses banned as an extremist organization since 2017 (surveillance, raids, fines, prison terms)
- Terrorism and extremism laws used against certain Muslim groups (Said Nursi readers; ~300 Hizb ut-Tahrir members serving 10-20 years in prison for extremism/terrorism though no connection to violence)
- Organizations affiliated with Falun Gong have been added to the Undesirable Foreign Organizations register
- Protestant Christians are frequently fined for “illegal missionary activity” and have been accused on state television of spreading COVID-19.
- Vandalism against minority religions

# Religious Freedom: Jehovah's Witnesses



# Religious Freedom: Jehovah's Witnesses

- The Investigative Committee, police, the FSB security service, and National Guard troops continue to raid Jehovah's Witness homes.
- Some of the raids have included torture, with no arrests or trials of suspect torturers.
- Criminal investigations of Jehovah's Witnesses in 65 of 83 federal districts, with the highest numbers of prosecutions in Primorye (36 people), the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region (23 people), and the Jewish Autonomous Region (23 people).