

RUSSIA



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2018

Tracking Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
Around the World



RUSSIA

AT A GLANCE

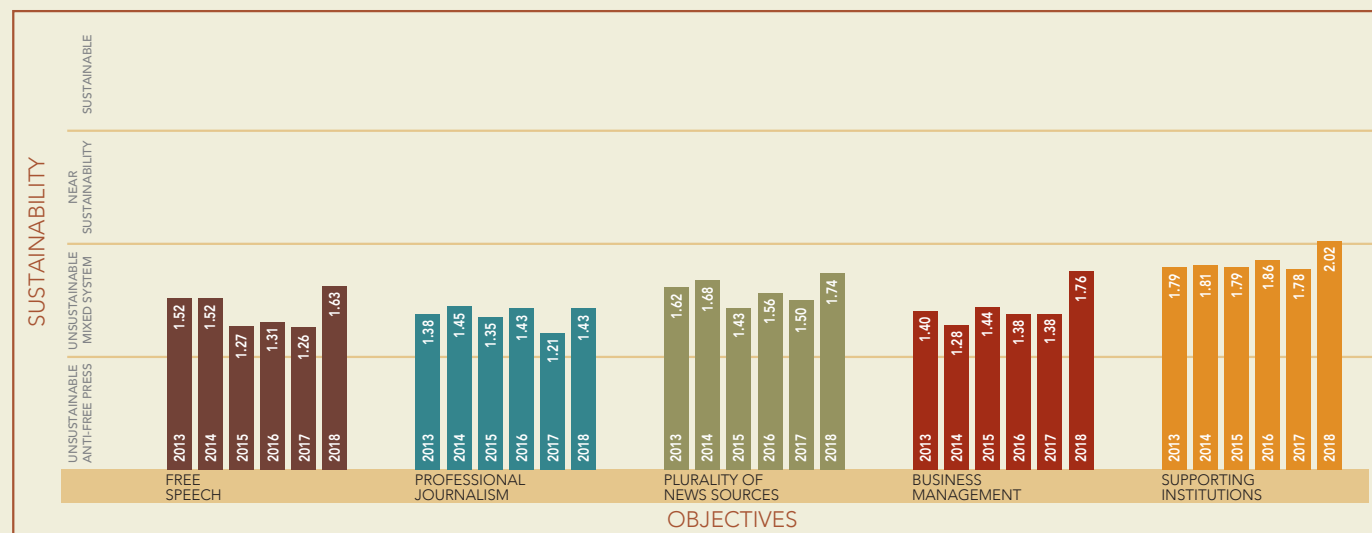
GENERAL

- **Population:** 142,257,519 (July 2017 est., CIA World Factbook)
- **Capital city:** Moscow
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Russian 77.7%, Tatar 3.7%, Ukrainian 1.4%, Bashkir 1.1%, Chuvash 1%, Chechen 1%, other 10.2%, unspecified 3.9% (2010 est., CIA World Factbook)
- **Religions (% of population):** Russian Orthodox 15-20%, Muslim 10-15%, other Christian 2%. Note: estimates are of practicing worshipers; Russia has large populations of non-practicing believers and non-believers, a legacy of over seven decades of Soviet rule; Russia officially recognizes Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as traditional religions (2006 est., CIA World Factbook)
- **Languages (% of population):** Russian (official) 85.7%, Tatar 3.2%, Chechen 1%, other 10.1% (2010 est., CIA World Factbook)
- **GNI (2016-Atlas):** \$1.426 trillion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2018)
- **GNI per capita (2019-PPP):** \$24,120 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2018)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.7% (male 99.7%, female 99.6%) (2015 est., CIA World Factbook)
- **President or top authority:** President Vladimir Putin (since May 7, 2012)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals:** Print: 23,628 newspapers; 30,813 magazines; radio stations: 3,408; television stations: 2,956; online: 5,472 news sites (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications, 2016)
- **News agencies:** ITAR-TASS (state), Russia Today (state), Interfax (private)
- **News Internet portals:** Top-three news portals by audience share (December 2017): Yandex (49.0%), Mail.ru (43.1%), Rambler (24.6%) (Mediascope, 2018)
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** 2016: RUB 360 billion; January–September 2017: RUB 285 billion (Association of Russian Communication Agencies, 2018)
- **Internet users:** 108,772,470 (July 2016 est., CIA World Fact Book)
- **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top-three daily general new national newspapers by readership (May–October 2017): Rossiyskaya Gazeta (687,200, state owned), Moskovsky Komsomolets (526,400, private), Izvestia (330,300, private) (Mediascope, 2018)
- **Broadcast ratings:** Top three national TV channels by audience : Russia 1 (15.3%), Channel One (13.7%), NTV (7.7%) (Mediascope, 2018). Top three national radio stations by audience: Evropa Plus (18.7%), Avtoradio (15.5%), Dorozhnoe Radio (15.4%) (Mediascope, 2018)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: RUSSIA



SCORE KEY

Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1): Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.



While there has been some minor improvement in its MSI scores this year, Russia's overall country score places it firmly in the Unsustainable category, reflecting a media sector that is dominated by political interests, particularly various levels of the government. Some independent media are managing to survive, but they face strong competition for advertising revenue, pressure from security forces, widespread self-censorship, and a growing number of laws that limit free speech.

In 2017, Russia was preparing for September regional and local council elections, and governor elections in 16 regions. The ruling United Russia party swept all of the governor elections and the six regional elections, receiving 77 percent of the local seats in Moscow. For the first time in history, the liberal opposition won 15 percent of the seats.

In March 2017, Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation released a documentary accusing Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of amassing a vast private fortune in excess of his official income. This video was shared on social media and viewed more than 20 million times. Navalny called for protest rallies, which took place in dozens of Russian cities, after state authorities ignored the video. As these rallies were not state sanctioned, hundreds of participants, including teenagers and several dozen journalists, were detained. State-controlled media mostly overlooked these protests.

The Russian economy is constrained by relatively low oil prices and inefficient state governance. Sanctions imposed by the European Union and United States grew from 1.4 to 1.8 percent, and inflation was nearly 3 percent. The advertising market grew by 14 percent, but is heavily skewed toward television, Internet, and national media outlets. While TV and Internet advertising markets demonstrate substantial growth, newspapers keep losing advertising revenue.

According to a Levada-Center survey, the most important events of 2017 were the Russian military operation in Syria and the International

Olympic Committee's banning of Russian athletes in the 2018 Winter Olympics. This coincides with the news agenda presented by state-run TV channels, which remain the dominant news source in the country: 86 percent of people report that TV is their main source of news. Viewers also feel that national TV channels focus too much on the Syrian military operation and international affairs, and do not pay enough attention to growing consumer prices, domestic poverty, and problems with Russian education, health, and social services.

The majority of Russian media outlets belong to national, regional, and local authorities, as well as affiliated businesses. The few independent media outlets face unfair competition, as state media get direct subsidies, but both independent and state media compete for advertising. An interview by the National News Service on February 21, 2017, with Vladimir Sungorkin, editor of the private newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, revealed, "State media are thriving... Nonstate media...are gradually moving toward bankruptcy, [while] other media are taking their place. The advertising market is shrinking, kiosks are being removed, and state media is growing... They don't need subscription and retail sales. They are distributed through all channels for free. The Internet is the only niche where nonstate media flourish. But in my opinion, there is little money in that niche, and now the state will make sure that money for online ads goes to state web resources." Sungorkin predicts that Russian state media will soon triumph over nonstate media.

**OBJECTIVE 1:
FREEDOM OF
SPEECH**

1.63

Article 29 of the Russian constitution guarantees free speech; the universal right to obtain, produce, and disseminate information; and media freedom. Censorship is prohibited. Despite these protections, there are a growing number of laws that are limiting free speech and are putting pressure on independent media and bloggers. For example, there is the law on the protection of personal data, the law against insulting religious beliefs, the law on protecting children from harmful information, and the anti-extremism law that includes but is not limited to prosecution for terrorism, degradation of national dignity, display of Nazi propaganda, and promotion of racial, national, religious, and social discord.

In November 2017, Russia adopted a law that allows for the designation of foreign media outlets as “foreign agents.” This law will potentially lead to prosecution of news sources that offer an alternative viewpoint, according to Galina Arapova, director of the Mass Media Defence Centre, in a newspaper interview with Argumenty i Fakty. She observed, “Provisions of this law are too broad. They can be applied to a media outlet as well as to a group of enthusiasts that moderate a public community in social media or post video on YouTube. The main criteria for designation is the presence of foreign funding to a media outlet or an internet project, even if this funding came as payment for advertising or a subscription. If we look at the recent statements made by the members of parliament, people who work for such communities and the media can also

be designated as foreign agents.”¹

Law enforcement officers regularly detain journalists covering public protests. In 2017, the Glasnost Defense Foundation reported 111 such cases.² Moreover, Russian society does not place a high value on freedom of speech and media freedom. According to surveys conducted by the Levada-Center, 44 percent of Russian citizens think that the majority of the population does not need correct information unless it has direct effect on their lives, and 48 percent of citizens think that media censorship is necessary (compared to 37 percent who believe that media censorship is unacceptable).³

“Most people, when you ask them what problems are most important today, don’t include free speech restriction among their top ten problems,” noted prominent Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner in an October 4, 2017, interview with the news site 29.ru. “In this country we have retained the Soviet perception of media; that is, the belief that media should serve the authorities—federal, regional, and municipal.”

The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) manages licensing of broadcast media and registration of print media. Registration is

1 Sycheva, Natalia. “В суд за репост. За какие высказывания в Сети можно поплатиться свободой,” Alliance of Independent Regional Publishers. January 15, 2018. http://www.anri.org.ru/news/item.php?SECTION_ID=15&ELEMENT_ID=16356.

2 Glasnost Defense Foundation. “Материалы мониторинга за 2017 года.” January–December 2017. <http://www.gdf.ru/monitoring>.

3 Волков, Д., & С. Гончаров. “Российский медиаландшафт: основные тенденции использования СМИ – 2017.” Levada-Center. August 22, 2017. <https://www.levada.ru/2017/08/22/16440/>.

required for print publications that have a print run of 1,000 or more copies. Print media registration is simple and does not set any market-entry barriers. According to the Glasnost Defense Foundation, there were no cases of Roskomnadzor denying media outlets registration in 2017.

The broadcast licensing process is competitive and mostly transparent, although there are cases when licensing decisions are not apolitical. For example, in 2016, Roskomnadzor refused to renew the broadcasting license for Europe Plus Tomsk, owned by the independent Tomsk media company TV-2, on the grounds that Viktor Muchnik (one of

Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS

- ▶ Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- ▶ Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- ▶ Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- ▶ Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- ▶ State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- ▶ Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- ▶ Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

RUSSIA

TV-2's shareholders) did not provide enough proof that he did not have dual citizenship. TV-2 appealed this decision in 2017, as there is no legal mechanism in Russia for proving lack of foreign citizenship, but the decision stood.

Licenses for a regional slot in digital TV multiplexes were awarded in 72 Russian regions during February and March 2017. Selection was competitive, with two to six companies applying for a license in a specific region. A regional digital license means considerable savings on signal distribution and a potential 10–20 percent audience increase for a TV channel. Out of the 72 TV channels picked, 49 were state-owned and 23 were private companies. This result, in the opinion of experts who prepared the Russian Television 2016 Industry Report (produced by Rospechat—the Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications), reflects the fact that “in the current economic and legal situation, the presence of private TV channels is becoming increasingly difficult.”

Websites may register as media with Roskomnadzor, but it is not required. In 2014, Russia adopted a law that required bloggers with more than 3,000 daily readers to register with Roskomnadzor. By June 2017, the “bloggers’ registry” included more than 2,200 entries, with the majority being public communities on the Russian social media network VKontakte. As of August 1, 2017, the bloggers’ registry was terminated.

Market entry and tax structure for media are comparable to other industries, except that foreigners are not allowed to launch Russian media outlets and cannot own more than 20 percent of their shares. In 2017, Roskomnadzor proposed to lower the value-added tax rate from 18 percent to 10 percent for all media.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists’ 2017 Global Impunity Index, Russia

ranks ninth in terms of the number (calculated as a percentage of the country’s population) of unsolved cases of journalists’ murders. In 2017, two Russian journalists were murdered: Dmitry Popkov from Krasnoyarsk Krai was shot dead and Nikolay Andrushchenko died in a St. Petersburg hospital after a violent assault. Both journalists were covering corruption issues.

According to the Glasnost Defense Foundation, there were 54 cases where journalists and bloggers received threats and 55 cases where they were assaulted in 2017. The Glasnost Defense Foundation is concerned that the growing number of threats is being followed by physical violence against journalists, according to its December 18, 2017, Digest. Law enforcement authorities are reluctant to investigate threat cases. For example, on June 12,

“In this country we have retained the Soviet perception of media; that is, the belief that media should serve the authorities—federal, regional, and municipal.”

2017, during an anticorruption meeting in the city of Makhachkala, Dagestan, three men seized the mobile phones of—and threatened to abuse physically—two female reporters, Saida Vagabova and Bariyat Idrisova, of the local independent newspaper Chernovik. Reportedly, one of the men was a staff member of the city district administration. Police classified this attack as a minor offense and refused to prosecute.

There is no public media, and there is no legislation regulating state media. Russian media law guarantees editorial independence of all media regardless of the ownership. In reality, the government fully controls state media, which serves its interests. Therefore, state media outlets represent

only the government’s point of view and mostly ignore the opposition. Since the majority of Russian media, including TV (which is the main informational source to most Russian people), belongs to the state, the government has considerable control over the national news agenda. For example, state media did not even mention the public anticorruption protests led by oppositional politician Alexey Navalny.

Libel constitutes a criminal offense. Although it is not punished by a prison sentence, an offender faces a fine ranging from RUB 500,000 to 5 million (approximately \$8,700 to \$87,000—bearing in mind that the average Russian salary is nearly RUB 35,000 (\$607) per month—or 160 to 480 hours of community service.

Libel cases against journalists are rare; however, public officials sometimes get preferential treatment. For example, Eric Chernyshov, a journalist from the Khakassia Republic, was found guilty of libel against a member of the Khakassia legislature, Ilya Ulianov. Chernyshov published several investigative pieces about the local chapter of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation selling one of its seats in the regional legislature⁴ to Ulianov. Additionally, Olga Li, editor of the Kursk newspaper People’s Journalist, was found guilty of libel against Kursk judge Liudmila Shurova. The libel case was filed in 2016 after Li posted a video criticizing Russian President Vladimir Putin. In this video, she also accused Judge Shurova of violating the presumption of innocence in a court case against a People’s Journalist reporter who organized a single-person picket. In contrast, a court in Saratov acquitted Sergei Vilkov, journalist of the newspaper Public Opinion, in a libel case filed by a

⁴ In Russia’s regional legislature elections, people vote for parties, not individual candidates. The results of the vote determine the number of seat a party will get.

RUSSIA

member of the regional legislature after investigative pieces linking him with local criminal organizations were published.

The Russian constitution guarantees all citizens the right to seek and receive information; access is limited only to information that is legally recognized as a state secret. Requests from journalists receive priority in terms of access to information: public officials have to respond to their requests for information within seven days, while citizens' requests are given 30 days for a response. In reality, all levels of government create obstacles to open access. In many municipalities, any request for information has to be in writing and addressed to the city mayor. According to the Glasnost Defense Foundation, there were 366 cases in which journalists were denied access to information in 2017.

Committed audiences often help independent media compensate for difficulties with information access. "In our city we have no access to government executives, and we learn about many important topics from press releases after the fact. But our readers help us. They inform us about their problems, achievements, and conflicts. We use all communication channels (social media, Telegram [a Russian messaging service], a 24/7 call line) and often learn about new stories well before other media and even state agencies," said Valentina Permyakova, newspaper editor for Gorodskie Vesti, from the small Ural city of Revda, in an interview for Zhurnalist magazine.⁵

In general, the law does not restrict media access to local and international news sources; however, in practice there are limitations. For example, when media uses information published by media outlets considered foreign agents in Russia,

it has to be labeled accordingly. There is also a ban on using information released by state-identified "undesirable" organizations. Media can be blocked or fined if they violate these rules.

Entering the journalism profession is free from barriers. Journalism education is not a prerequisite for getting a position as a journalist. Although the Ministry of Labor developed national standards that set forth requirements for journalists and editors, including a requirement to have a journalism degree, media outlets are not required to follow these standards.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

1.43

Many people who work in media "have a vague idea what journalism is about. They see mass media as a venue for political propaganda or a means to make money," commented one of the panelists. "Journalists do not resist increasing state control over society. All media run only positive news agendas. On the regional TV, three news reports out of five are about the governor. The spirit of journalism is disappearing," observed another panelist. It is easier for the government to control unprofessional journalists, noted yet another panelist.

Fair, objective, and well-sourced journalism exists only in a few private media outlets—e.g., national TV and newspapers Kommersant and Vedomosti, along with a few regional print and online outlets that are run by champions of professional journalism. "Colleagues from state and municipal media don't follow any standards because their jobs require them to engage in propaganda," noted one of the

panelists, an editor of a small private newspaper.

The Congress of Russian Journalists adopted the Code of Professional Ethics of the Russian Journalist in 1994, which is in line with generally accepted international norms of journalism ethics. "There are standards, but nobody follows them. And there are no mechanisms for enforcing the standards," commented one of the panelists. Only a few private media that adhere to professional journalism standards establish their own codes and follow ethical principles—for example, they make clear distinctions between news reporting and advertorial pieces.

Self-censorship is widespread and often is at the heart of the editorial policy, especially in the state-controlled media. For example, according to one of the panelists, the Sakhalin Oblast government took control over two of the remaining independent online media outlets—Citysakh.ru and Sakhalin Online. In one case, the authorities were able to change ownership; in another, they were able to control the outlet financially. Both outlets now depend on state funding and coordinate their coverage with the regional government. For example, "the deal may be that during a certain period, there is no critical coverage of the governor. And for two months prior to the elections, the agreement was to have no negative news. Everything is good—we have good medicine, good roads, good day care and schools; all coverage has to be positive," shared one of the panelists.

Because of online media, blogs, and social networks, all key events and issues in the country become public knowledge. "Competition with the Internet forces journalists of regular media to cover all events, but this coverage is not necessarily complete and fair. Often, only one viewpoint is presented," one of the panelists said. The smaller a media outlet's audience, the more freedom it

⁵ Никитушин, Александр. "Крутящий момент." *Zhurnalist*, December 12, 2017. <http://jrnlist.ru/revda-info>.

Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS

- ▶ Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- ▶ Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- ▶ Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- ▶ Journalists cover key events and issues.
- ▶ Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- ▶ Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- ▶ Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- ▶ Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

has in selecting news stories, noted prominent TV journalist Vladimir Pozner in an October 3, 2017, interview with the independent TV channel STV in Severodvinsk. “My program is broadcast on Channel One, and I know that there are certain people whom I cannot invite as guests... Channel One buys my program and they are against Navalny, for example...and many others. I compromise, because I think it’s worth it.”

More than a million people follow opposition politician Alexey Navalny on YouTube alone, but covering his anticorruption protests can have negative consequences for journalists. The owner of KurchatovTV, a private TV station funded by the Kurskaya Nuclear Power Plant and the Kurchatov city government, closed the newsroom and laid off all the journalists after they covered anticorruption protests initiated by Navalny on March 26, 2017.

The pay level for journalists and editors is insufficient to keep qualified personnel within the profession. The site Planerka.org analyzed the level of salaries offered to journalists and editors in five major cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, and Nizhny Novgorod. On average, journalists’ salaries range from RUB 21,000 (about \$370) in Nizhny Novgorod to RUB 43,000 (\$750) in Moscow; editors’ salaries range from RUB 30,000 (\$530) in Nizhny Novgorod to RUB 48,000 (\$840) in Moscow. Typical salaries in these cities range from RUB 30,000 in Nizhny Novgorod to RUB 76,000 (\$1,340) in Moscow. Salaries paid by media outlets in smaller cities are even lower.

Salary level disparities between Moscow and other Russian regions lead to a constant outflow of journalists from the regional media to Moscow-based outlets. In addition, many journalists leave the profession to take jobs in public relations and advertising, where salaries are higher. In fact, many journalism school graduates never work in media; they go straight into public relations and advertising.

Most panelists think that much of the news and political shows on Russian TV are infotainment rather than real, informative programming. This applies to all TV news channels. According to research by the Levada-Center, about 40 percent of the news and analytical program watchers of major state TV channels perceive them as serious and analytical, with multiple viewpoints. Another 25 percent think that these programs are staged, biased, and farcical.

The media have sufficient facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news. However, due to falling revenues, media outlets in smaller markets are not able to purchase new equipment. For example, at the Urals Media Forum in December 2017, representatives of small local TV companies complained that cameras, mics, and other TV equipment were

rapidly wearing out, but they did not have money to buy new equipment.⁶

Quality niche reporting exists, but it is rare. Since it is expensive, most media outlets cannot afford to have reporters working on specialized beats or spending a lot of time on investigative stories. “TV investigative reporting is gone,” noted prominent TV journalist Leonid Mlechin at the Urals Media Forum. “We should be finding out what’s going on and helping people to understand what’s happening, but it’s gone. People can see that this kind of journalism is no longer around and gradually get used to it. Now, no media outlet can afford to have even one reporter spending a month on just

“Colleagues from state and municipal media don’t follow any standards because their jobs require them to engage in propaganda,” noted one of the panelists, an editor of a small private newspaper.

one piece. And this is really bad, because since a newspaper or a journalist cannot create an investigative piece, society can’t get this information.”⁷

“As revenue went down, we had to optimize our editorial processes. We have redistributed beats. The news editor also covers the court beat, but as a result, we cannot follow court cases closely or spend enough time in court. A reporter who was covering the housing beat now also covers medical issues,” shared one of the panelists, the owner of a small local newspaper.

6 Pankratova, Darya, & Ekaterina Kirichenko. “Уральский медиафорум раскрыл проблемы региональных СМИ.” GIPP Soyuz Izdatelei, December 11, 2017. <http://www.gipp.ru/viewer.php?id=65764>.

7 Ibid.

**OBJECTIVE 3:
PLURALITY
OF NEWS**

1.74

There are multiple news sources, but only a few that offer multiple viewpoints. On the national level, these include national TV channels RBC-TV and Dozhd; Radio Echo of Moscow; newspapers RBC, Vedomosty, and Novaya Gazeta; and Euronews, BBC Russian Service, and Radio Freedom. On the local level, there are several dozen independent media outlets. However, in most Russian cities, there are no independent local media. National, regional, and local authorities and affiliated businesses own the majority of media, and they typically reflect the viewpoint of their owner.

At the same time, because of the high availability of the Internet, two-thirds of the Russian adult population can potentially access media that offer multiple viewpoints.⁸ According to the research by the Levada-Center, only 28 percent of Russians regularly use at least one of the independent news sources, and only six percent use more than three independent news sources to compare information. Another 16 percent of people report that they compare information from different news sources to check the objectivity of news stories.

Television remains the main source of information. According to the Levada-Center, 91 percent of Russian citizens watch TV news at least once a week, and 86 percent report that TV is their main source of news. Additionally, 25 percent of

Russians get their news from the Internet and 16–17 percent from radio and 16–17 percent from print media.

The most popular sources of national and international news on TV are the state-controlled Channel One, Russia-1, and Russia 24, as well as NTV. NTV belongs to Gazprom-Media, a subsidiary of Gazprom, in which the government is a major shareholder. According to Levada-Center, news aggregators Yandex News and Mail.ru News are the most popular online news sources, with 23 percent and 11 percent of Russian citizens (respectively) accessing them regularly. Even though both aggregators belong to private companies, the aggregators reportedly moderate news in favor of the government. For example, during the March 26, 2017, anticorruption protests, Yandex News removed news about the protests from its top news list.

Newspapers serve as a news source by 46 percent of citizens. The most popular newspapers are local and regional ones (read by 22 percent of the population) that usually belong to regional and local governments, and national tabloids such as Argumenty i Fakty (12 percent) and Komsomolskaya Pravda (7 percent). Readership of independent high-quality newspapers such as Vedomosty, Kommersant, RBC, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, and Novaya Gazeta does not exceed 1–2 percent.

Fifty-five percent of Russian citizens regularly use social networking sites. The most popular social networks are national—e.g., Odnoklassniki (used by 43 percent of adult population) and VKontakte (40 percent). Considerably fewer people use Facebook (12 percent), Instagram (11 percent), Google+ (7 percent), and Twitter (6 percent); LinkedIn is blocked in Russia. Only 19 percent of people use social networks to get national and international news. The trend now is the rapid popularity of the Telegram channels (similar to, but not the same as, a Reddit sub). The news Telegram channels such

as Nezygar and Metodichka already have tens of thousands of subscribers.

In 2012, Russian authorities started blocking websites that violate legal provisions. Initially, this practice was used against sites that distribute child porn and promote suicide and drug use. Later, the practice expanded to websites that feature extremist content. Since November 2017, the law allows the blocking of “undesirable” websites. Still, access to most domestic and international media is not legally restricted.

Levada-Center research indicates that there is a connection between the use of independent media and level of education and income: people who regularly use several independent news

Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS

- ▶ A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- ▶ Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- ▶ Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- ▶ Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- ▶ A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- ▶ State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.

8 Волков, Денис, & Степан Гончаров. “Российский медиаландшафт: основные тенденции использования СМИ – 2017.” Levada-Center. August 22, 2017. <https://www.levada.ru/2017/08/22/16440/>.

sources typically have higher education and income levels. They are also more likely to know foreign languages and to participate in charitable activities and civic activism.

According to Levada-Center, 86 percent of Russians do not know foreign languages,⁹ which creates a barrier in accessing foreign media. Additionally, there is a huge disparity in media access between major cities that have vibrant media markets and inexpensive high-speed access to the Internet, and rural areas with no local media and limited or no access to the Internet.

The majority of state media does not reflect a spectrum of political views and serves the interests of the government rather than the citizens, who recognize this. For example, according to the Levada-Center, more than half of the citizens think that state TV channels are censored. Still, in some small cities, municipal newspapers adhere to high journalism standards and produce high-quality local news in the interest of their readership.

Major national news agencies such as state-controlled TASS and RIA Novosti, as well as privately owned Interfax, are not editorially independent. The majority of about 200 regional news agencies are affiliated with and supported by regional governments; accordingly, their editorial policies are not independent. Still, there are a few outlets—for example, Ura.ru and Znak.com in the Urals and TV2.today in Tomsk—that are independent.

National news agencies distribute news, photos, and videos to media outlets. For example, TASS reports that it has more than 1,000 media outlet subscribers to its news feeds. At the same time, all news outlets have their own websites that are

popular with the public. For example, news from the RIA Novosti website was shared on social media over four million times in 2017.¹⁰

Independent and privately owned media produce their own news and actually fill the information gap left by the state media. “Fair competition between private and state media is impossible because the government sets the rules in the market... But this disparity gives private media an advantage: since state media operate under favorable conditions, they stop competing for readers, while private media pay close attention to their audiences

The majority of state media does not reflect a spectrum of political views and serves the interests of the government rather than the citizens, who recognize this. For example, according to the Levada-Center, more than half of the citizens think that state TV channels are censored.

and enrich content, try new formats and ‘tricks,’ and use the main advantage of the press—quality analytical materials,” said Vitaly Obedin, deputy chief editor of the newspaper Yakutsk Vecherny, at the 2017 All-Russian Civic Forum,¹¹ where the future of regional media was discussed.

While media ownership is not fully transparent, the government is the largest media owner. The

federal government has 38.9 percent of the shares of the national TV Channel One and 100 percent of the shares in the All-Russian TV and Radio Company, which operates three national channels: general interest Russia-1, all-news Russia-24, and culture and education channel Russia-K. The Republic of Tatarstan owns Tatmedia holding company, which operates 98 regional, district, and local newspapers; 15 magazines; 17 TV channels; 10 radio stations; 87 websites; and news outlet Tatar-Info. The government of Rostov-on-Don, through the Don Media holding company, owns TV channel Don24, radio station FM-na-Donu, information outlet DON24, newspaper Molot, and advertising outlet Don Media. The government of the Tula Oblast owns the TV channel Tula and 26 regional and local newspapers.

Foreign ownership in Russian media is limited to 20 percent of shares. The introduction of this rule in 2014 is seen as detrimental to Russian independent media, as it limits access to foreign investment.

In general, there is a broad spectrum of social interests reflected in Russian media. However, major media outlets do a much worse job in this regard. Major media ignore many issues—such as gender, religion, ethnic tensions, and sexual orientation—that community sites, blogs, and social media cover.

The economic crisis that started in 2009 heavily hit niche print media that traditionally had covered specific social interests. “Since the beginning of the crisis, about ten thousand media—from glossy magazines to local newspapers—had to close. We have already lost whole sectors of media that were covering popular science, youth, literature, technology, economics, environment, music, agriculture, [and] children issues. This was a special strata of high quality press that was providing educational content. The circulation of remaining media of this kind are several thousand copies at best. In essence, they are not present anymore in

9 Levada-Center. “Запад”: восприятие и стремление эмигрировать. October 13, 2015. <https://www.levada.ru/2015/10/13/zapad-vospriyatie-i-stremlenie-emigrirovat/>.

10 Russia Today. “Пользователи соцсетей выбрали РИА Новости главным источником информации в 2017 году.” January 11, 2018. <http://xn--c1acb12abd1kab1og.xn--p1ai/news/20180111/49412.html>.

11 АНРИ. “Будущее региональных СМИ: итоги работы площадки АНРИ на ОГФ-2017.” January 12, 2017. http://www.anri.org.ru/news/item.php?SECTION_ID=20&ELEMENT_ID=16307.

the information sector of this country. Only glossy and advertising press, major weeklies, state media, and crosswords and television guides are still doing well,” said Igor Mosin, general director of the Women’s Health magazine, in an interview with the Guild of Press Publishers on December 21, 2017.

Russia is a multinational country: there are more than 190 ethnic groups speaking more than 150 languages. According to MediaDigger.ru, there are Russian media in 161 languages. For example, there are 916 Tatar language media. According to the study “Russian Atlas of the Ethnic Media,” conducted by the Journalism Department of the Moscow State University since 2015, the state owns the majority of minority language media outlets. In the case of print and online media, 100 percent of registered minority language media outlets belong to the government. The study also found that a majority of TV and radio content in minority languages is entertainment programming. Print and online media cover both general news as well as educational and cultural topics.¹²

Russia retained the Soviet media model: national media cover national and international news, while regional and local media focus on their respective news. As a result, regional and local news rarely appear in the national media. According to the Levada-Center, Russian citizens believe that the national TV channels are doing well with topics such as the Russian military operation in Syria, international terrorism, and Russian international affairs, but their coverage is insufficient concerning such issues as domestic poverty, inflation, unemployment, and problems in the education, health, and social sectors of the country.¹³

12 Гладкова, Анна. “Атлас этнических СМИ России.” *Zhurnalst*, July 9, 2016. <http://jrnlst.ru/content/atlas-etnicheskih-smi-rossii>.

13 Волков, денис, & Степан Гончаров. *Ibid*.

**OBJECTIVE 4:
BUSINESS
MANAGEMENT**

1.76

“At present, it is no longer economically sustainable and profitable to run media as a business,” said Ivan Eremin, general director of information agencies UralPolit.ru and FederalPress, at the Urals Media Forum, as reported by Guild of Press Publishers. “As a result of technological progress and authorities’ efforts to undermine press as the ‘fourth estate,’ media can hardly sustain themselves, let alone make a profit. At the same time state subsidies are distributed unevenly and are mostly in favor of federal media outlets. For example, the budget of the Information Society program that provides financial support to media is diminishing, but this did not affect the federal media; in reality, state subsidies keep growing. In 2017, support for federal media from the state came to RUB 109.9 billion [\$1.9 billion], and in 2018 they will get RUB 125.1 billion [\$2.2 billion].”

Under such conditions of unfair funding competition of state media, independent private media outlets can survive only by increasing operational efficiency. They are still competing with state media for advertising and circulation revenue. There are a small number of independent private media outlets that have developed sustainable business models, enabling them to maintain editorial independence. These independent media have professional management teams and are constantly investing in staff. At the same time, many Russian media are struggling to hire highly qualified professionals. According to a survey conducted and published on December 14, 2017, by the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, 59 percent of regional media

face a shortage of qualified staff.

The increasing popularity of social media and growth of the online advertising market give bloggers the opportunity to earn money. According to estimates of the Russian Research Agency for Bloggers, in the first half of 2017, the 15 most popular Russian bloggers made nearly RUB 1 million (about \$17,000) to RUB 24 million (about \$416,000) each.¹⁴ All of these bloggers generate entertainment content.

Editorial independence depends on the values of media owners rather than revenue sources. Private, independent media try to ensure a variety of revenue sources and work with a broad range of clients, but their efforts are being undermined by the declining regional economies. In these regions, companies depend on the regional government and have small advertising budgets, so an independent general news outlet cannot survive by just selling advertising, according to Sofia Krapotkina, chief editor of the online magazine 7x7, in an interview with RBC.¹⁵ “Because of unfavorable economic conditions, small businesses in little cities like ours face serious difficulties,” said Valery Bezpiatykh, publisher of the small town newspaper Gorodskie Vesti, which is located in Revda, Sverdlovsk Oblast, in his interview with Zhurnalst magazine. “Almost half of our advertisers either went out of business or became much smaller. Since our business plan is based on 80 percent of revenue coming from small local business, this is a major problem for us.” Declining advertising revenue forces media to apply for state subsidies, information support contracts,

14 РИАБ. “Самый богатый блоггер: I полугодие 2017.” <http://riabloggers.ru/researches/15>.

15 Mass Media Defence Centre. “Эксперты Кудрина заявили о застое в российских СМИ.” December 21, 2017. <http://mmdc.ru/news-div/digest/eksperty-kudrina-zayavili-o-zastoe-v-rossiyskikh-smi-/>.

Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS

- ▶ Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- ▶ Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- ▶ Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- ▶ Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- ▶ Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- ▶ Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

and grants. And in some regions, state money comes with the requirement that the media outlet does not criticize authorities.

The Russian advertising market grew in 2017 and is expected to reach a record RUB 400 billion (about \$7 billion) by the end of 2017. At the same time, the market is heavily skewed in favor of TV and Internet; they get about 80 percent of the advertising revenue. While Internet advertising grew by 23 percent, exceeding TV ad sales for the first time (TV ad sales still increased by 13 percent), newspapers lost 3 percent of their advertising revenue. There is also a huge disparity between national and regional markets. According to the Russian Association of Communication Agencies, from January to September 2017, total advertising sales amounted to RUB 285 billion (about \$5 billion); regional media received only RUB 31 billion (about \$538 million),

however.¹⁶ Regional media outlets are concerned that major national advertising agencies favor national media and ignore media in the regions.

Law limits the amount of advertising in Russian media. For TV, it cannot exceed 15 minutes per hour; for radio, 20 percent of airtime per day; and for print media, except for publications with exclusively classified advertising content, 40 percent of space. As a result, news and information content does not get lost at the expense of advertising. Interestingly, because of these limits, advertisers experienced a shortage of advertising slots on TV in 2017, and so ad placement prices went up. State media are allowed to sell advertising and often undersell private media because of their guaranteed state funding.

State subsidies and information contracts, through which the government pays media to cover its operations and this coverage is approved by press departments prior to publication, heavily distort the media market. The impact of this has increased impact in regions where the amount of state media expenditure is comparable to advertising revenue. In 2016, regional media made RUB 45 billion (about \$780 million) of advertising revenue and received RUB 43.2 billion (about \$749 million) from regional authorities. In 2017, regional authorities planned to spend RUB 40.4 billion (about \$701 million) on media, according to the Mass Media Defence Centre. There are few regions (Chelyabinsk and Voronezh, for example) where authorities distribute state subsidies to media fairly and transparently. But in a majority of regions, state money goes to loyal media.

In small cities, independent media may face unfair competition with media owned by large

businesses which are used as corporate public relations mouthpieces. “In the small local media markets, private media monopolists affiliated with local authorities monopolize the markets in the same way as the state media. For example, in Revda and Pervouralsk, there is no municipal media anymore, but there is a major corporate media outlet affiliated with authorities. As a result, private media again face unfair competition,” noted Valery Bezpiatykh at the 2017 All-Russian Media Forum, as reported by Alliance of Independent Regional Publishers (ANRI).

Only national media can afford to hire market research companies. Regional, independent private media use openly published marketing data and conduct small-scale studies themselves. Additionally, marketing data inform editorial decisions. “We evaluate every project from the point of view of potential gains it can generate—in terms of financial gains, image gains and audience growth,” said Valery Bezpiatykh in his interview with Zhurnalist magazine.

The budget of the Information Society program that provides financial support to media is diminishing, but this did not affect the federal media; in reality, state subsidies keep growing.

As of September 2017, TV broadcast ratings can be measured only by Roskomnadzor-selected companies. The share of foreign capital in these companies cannot exceed 20 percent. Roskomnadzor selected Mediascope (formerly Mediascope/TNS), which is part of TNS Gallup Media. To meet the ownership requirements, the British advertising group WPP sold its share in TNS Gallup Media to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center. Mediascope has been granted a three-year monopoly for media opinion surveys

16 АКАР. “Суммарный объем рекламы в средствах ее распространения за первые три квартала 2017 года.” http://www.akarussia.ru/knowledge/market_size/id7558.

in Russia. It is committed to improving its polling practices by rotating households in its polling panels and increasing the number of local people meters, as well as the number of interviews via mobile phones. All of this is meant to increase the level of media trust.

**OBJECTIVE 5:
SUPPORTING
INSTITUTIONS**

2.02

The National Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters and the Guild of Press Publishers are major media-related Russian trade associations. As of June 2017, the Guild of Press Publishers had 272 members; however, the National Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters does not disclose its membership data. Both associations cooperate with international trade associations, conduct trade fairs, publish industrial magazines, and provide analytical, informative, and training services to their members. The associations also lobby the Russian government to advance the interests of their members.

The ANRI brings together media outlets that adhere to principles of fair journalism and editorial independence. As of December 2017, ANRI consists of 67 members. ANRI organizes training programs and industrial events, and lobbies the government on behalf of its members. For example, in 2017, ANRI organized a discussion on the future of Russian regional media at the All-Russian Civic Forum.

In order to provide services to their members, all three associations have to fundraise in addition to having membership fees. ANRI was awarded a president's grant in the amount of RUB 1.5 million (about \$26,000) to conduct a webinar series on

the legal aspects of media operation. This is one example of such funding.

In November 2017, the Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ) elected a new chair, Vladimir Solovyov, a prominent TV journalist who is currently an adviser to the director of the national TV channel Russia-1. Some observers see this appointment as an increase in state control over the journalism profession. "RUJ became integrated in the system of state control and will be receiving state funding. The situation with our regional chapter is the same. A new chair was quietly elected this summer. The candidate was recommended by the government. He has good connections with them and can secure funding. But he won't help us when necessary," commented one of the panelists, an editor of a small independent newspaper. Seeking state funding is seen as a key means for RUJ maintaining operations. For example, a regional RUJ chapter in Primorsky Krai received a president's grant (RUB 3 million, or about \$52,000) to train young journalists in 2017. At a membership meeting, Viktor Sukhanov, chapter head, recommended that other regional chapters follow their example.¹⁷ Thus, there is concern that RUJ and its chapters do not adequately protect journalist rights and promote quality journalism.

There are a few nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that support free speech and media freedom. The Glasnost Defense Foundation monitors violations of media rights and runs educational programs. The Mass Media Defence Centre provides free legal advice and support to media: In 2017 alone, they provided 3,779 consultations and represented media

¹⁷ *Vesti: Primorye*. "Приморские журналисты замахнулись на создание Тихоокеанского медиасоюза." December 22, 2017. <http://vestiprim.ru/news/ptrnews/58321-primorskie-zhurnalisty-zamahnu-lis-na-sozdanie-tihookeanskogo-mediasoyuza.html>.

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- ▶ Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- ▶ Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- ▶ Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- ▶ Sources of newsprint NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- ▶ Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- ▶ Printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

in 48 court cases. The Press Development Institute-Siberia promotes civic investigative journalism. The Regional Press Institute offers training programs to media outlets. NGOs cooperate with international organizations. For example, the Regional Press Institute, in cooperation with the Danish Association for Investigative Journalism, International Media Support, and Fojo Media Institute, operates an investigative journalism support program for Russian journalists working in the Russian northwest. All of these NGOs (except for the Regional Press Institute) are recognized as "foreign agents," which creates an increased administrative burden to comply with the high reporting requirements associated with the foreign agent status.

RUSSIA

According to Vuzoteka.ru, there are 153 journalism degree programs in Russia, and journalism ranks third among the most popular degrees. Several programs include sufficient practice-oriented training—for example, Moscow State University, St. Petersburg University, and Higher School of Economics. However, most programs focus more on theory than practice and are taught by people with little practical experience. In many cases, journalism, public relations, and advertising are taught within the same department. Media outlets are unhappy with the skill level of journalism graduates and have developed their own on-the-job training programs.

There are numerous short-term training opportunities—offered by NGOs, media trade associations, and RUJ—that range from webinars to internships with leading media. Training is provided on a whole range of topics, from reporting to legal aspects to media management. Workshops on digital technologies, content monetization, and media design are very popular with media professionals. Media outlets usually cover training and associated travel expenses.

Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, and are not monopolized nor restricted. However, newsprint prices and printing fees keep rising, which undermines the economic sustainability of print media. According to the Russian Press Distributors Association, newsprint prices went up by 45 percent in the past four years.

Distribution channels for media are restricted. The Russian Post is the main distributor of subscriptions to publications. When the government discontinued subscription delivery subsidies to the Russian Post in 2014, increased subscription prices resulted in the loss of 42 percent of subscription circulation. In most regions, the number of press

kiosks is declining, and supermarket networks refuse to sell local newspapers. Two big private press distribution networks—Neva-Press in St. Petersburg and Press-Logistic in Moscow—went bankrupt, leaving over RUB 1 billion (about \$17.3 million) in debts. The introduction of digital television, where the government supports broadcasting of 20 federal and 72 regional TV channels, means that other channels (especially small local ones) have to use cable operator services. As a result, these services substantially increased the fees for such channels.

“RUJ became integrated in the system of state control and will be receiving state funding. The situation with our regional chapter is the same. A new chair was quietly elected this summer. The candidate was recommended by the government. He has good connections with them and can secure funding. But he won’t help us when necessary,” commented one of the panelists.

According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 60 percent of adult Russians use the Internet on a daily basis, and 70 percent use it at least once a month. There is a disparity in Internet use between the major cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, where 79–80 percent of people use the Internet at least monthly, and other cities (70–74 percent) and rural areas (60 percent). Mobile operators considerably expanded coverage of 4G networks beyond major cities, and the speed of mobile Internet increased by 25–30 percent

and reached 10 mbps in 2017.¹⁸ According to the Ministry of Telecomm and Mass Communications, mobile Internet traffic increased by appropriately 90 percent. However, there are still locations where Internet connections are slow or non-existent, and mobile connections are weak and unstable.

List of Panelists

Because of laws restricting NGO activity and contacts with U.S.-based NGOs, the participants in the Russia study will remain anonymous. A Russian journalist developed this chapter in December 2017 after a series of structured interviews with colleagues in the media sector.

18 Kodachigov, Valery. “Мобильный интернет в России растет все быстрее.” *Vedomosti*, September 18, 2017. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2017/09/18/734306-mobilnii-internet>.