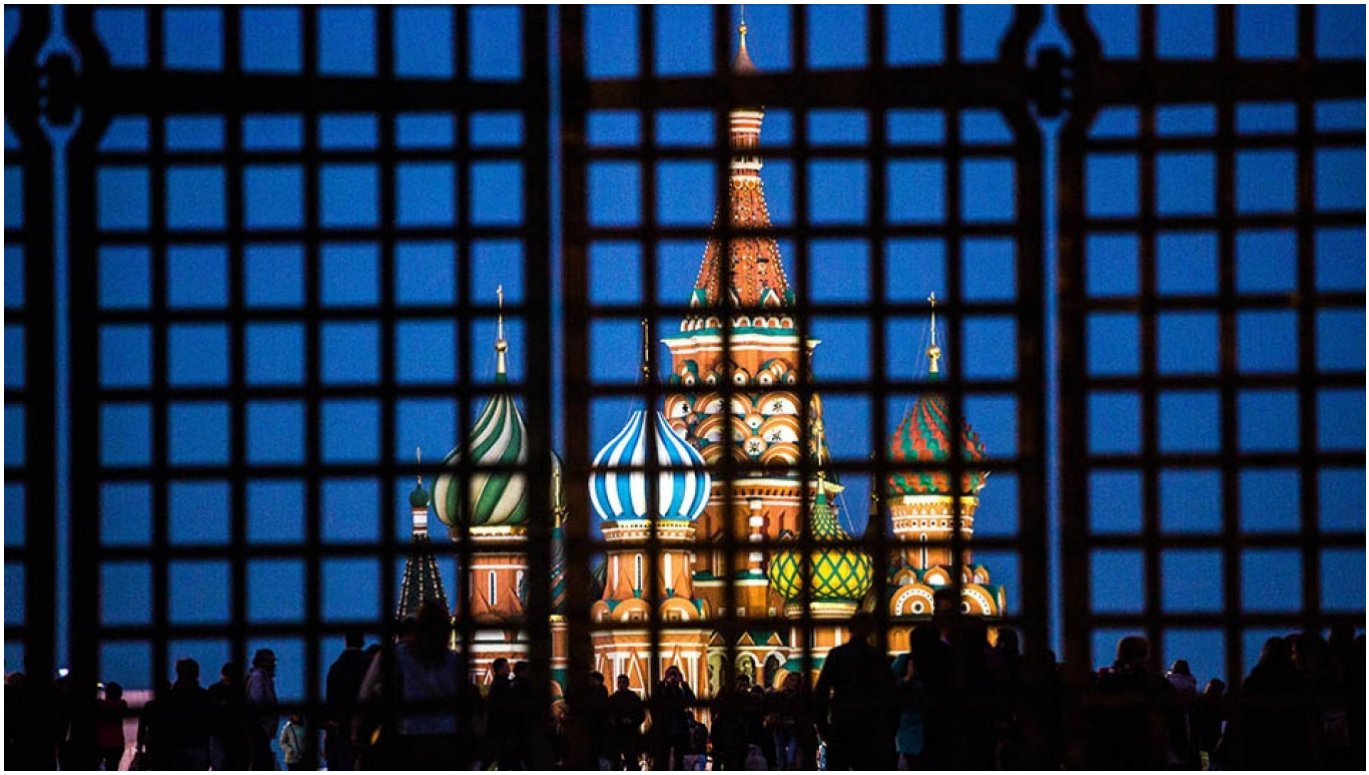
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Russia Massively Contributes to Decline in Democratic Norms, Freedom House Says

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Dmitry Feoktistov / TASS

Freedom House has named Russia among a string of "heavyweight" countries that undermine democratic norms abroad, contributing to a 13th consecutive "decline in global freedom."

Russia has featured regularly in the U.S.-funded monitoring group's annual "Freedom in the World" report documenting attacks on civil and democratic freedoms around the world.

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The persecution of dissidents, repression of Crimean Tatars and dangers facing journalists

and activists put Russia among countries labeled "Not Free," Freedom House said in the 2019 report published Tuesday.

The report ranked Russia 88th out of 118 countries, flanked by Congo and Vietnam on either side.

Together with countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and China, Russia was singled out for having "recently targeted political dissidents abroad with practices such as harassment, extradition requests, kidnapping, and even assassination."

Freedom House said Russian journalists and activists worked under "perilous conditions, risking arrest, violence and even death for their independent reporting in 2018."

The NGO also said that Russian President Vladimir Putin won re-election through "repression of independent media and civil society, the abuse of state resources and the persecution of genuine political opponents — as well as outright fraud."

Worldwide, political rights and civil liberties declined in 68 countries and improved in only 50 countries over the past year, the monitoring group said.

Finland, Norway and Sweden topped Freedom House's index with greater civil liberties and resilient democratic institutions. Eritrea, South Sudan, ex-Soviet Turkmenistan and Syria placed dead last with near-zero scores.

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