

10. The members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are selected by

- A) the heads of state of their country's government
- B) a special all-European popular election
- C) direct popular election by the people of their respective countries
- D) the Council of Ministers
- E) the Commissioner

**Country-Context Question: (20 minutes)**

Devolution and integration are opposite trends in policymaking practices.

- a) Define devolution. Define integration.
- b) Describe two examples of devolution in British government and politics.
- c) Explain one benefit of integration for EU member-states.
- d) Explain one reason why an EU member-state might resist EU-sponsored integration.



**UNIT TWO:  
COMMUNIST AND  
POST-COMMUNIST  
COUNTRIES**

Over the course of the past century, the advanced industrialized democracies (represented by Britain in this book) have become the wealthiest and most powerful countries in the world. However, these countries have been widely criticized for the degree of economic inequality that exists among their citizens, as well as the big divide in wealth and power between them and the other countries of the world. Have advanced democracies encouraged and valued freedom at the expense of equality to such a degree that we may see them as basically unjust societies? Communist countries answer this question with a resounding "Yes!" and base their governments on the belief that equality is undervalued in capitalist countries such as Britain and the United States.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century two large countries declared themselves to be communist nations – the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Together they were home to a large share of the world's population, and the economic and political influence of communism was indisputable. Today the Soviet Union has collapsed, leaving in its wake dozens of fledgling democracies, all struggling for their survival. Among major nations, only China remains under communist rule, although Cuba and North Korea are well-known communist regimes as well.

Communism has taken many forms since its birth in the mid-nineteenth century. The variations are so vast that they often appear to have little in common, although all claim to have roots in Marxism.

## MARXISM

The father of communism is generally acknowledged to be Karl Marx, who first wrote about his interpretation of history and vision for the future in *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. He saw capitalism – or the free market – as an economic system that exploited workers and increased the gap between the rich and the poor. He believed that conditions in capitalist countries would eventually become so bad that workers would join together in a revolution of the **proletariat** (workers), and overcome the **bourgeoisie**, who were owners of factories and other means of production. Marx envisioned a new world after the revolution, one in which social class would disappear because ownership of private property would be banned. According to Marx, communism encourages equality and cooperation, and without property to encourage greed and strife, governments would be unnecessary, and they would wither away.

## MARXISM-LENINISM

Russia was the first country to base a political system on Marx's theory. The "revolution of the proletariat" occurred in 1917, but did not follow the steps outlined by Karl Marx. Marx believed that the revolution would first take place in industrialized, capitalist countries. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia had only begun to industrialize by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was far behind countries like Britain, Germany, and the United States. However, revolutionary leader V. I. Lenin believed that the dictatorial tsar should be overthrown, and that Russian peasants should be released from oppression. Lenin changed the nature of communism by asserting the importance of the **vanguard of the revolution** – a group of revolutionary leaders who could provoke the revolution in non-capitalist Russia. The government he established in 1917 was based on **democratic centralism**, or the "vanguard" who would lead the revolution since the people were incapable of providing leadership themselves. Democratic centralism provided for a hierarchical party structure in which leaders were elected from below. Discussion was permitted by party members until a decision was made, but "centralism" took over, and the leaders allowed no questioning of the decision after the fact. Lenin proceeded to direct industrializa-

tion and agricultural development from a centralized government, and capitalistic ventures were severely restricted in the Soviet Union.

The system that Lenin set up has been incredibly influential because all communist countries that followed based their systems on the Soviet model. Political power rests with the Communist Party, a relatively small "vanguard" organization that by its very nature allows no competing ideologies to challenge it. The legitimacy of the state rests squarely on the party as the embodiment of communist ideology. Ironically, this feature of communist systems transformed Marxism, with all of its idealistic beliefs in equality for common citizens, into authoritarianism. Communist states are often associated with the use of force, but they also rely on **co-optation**, or allocation of power throughout various political, social, and economic institutions. Recruitment of elites takes place through **nomenklatura**, the process of filling influential jobs in the state, society, or the economy with people approved and chosen by the Communist Party. *Nomenklatura* includes not only political jobs, but almost all top positions in other areas as well, such as university presidents, newspaper editors, and military officers. Party approval translates as party membership, so the easiest way for an individual to get ahead is to join the party.

Despite the authoritarian nature of communist states, it is also true that the system does allow for a certain amount of **social mobility**, or the opportunity for individuals to change their social status over the course of their lifetimes.

## MAOISM AND MARKET-BASED SOCIALISM

China's version of communism began shortly after Lenin's revolution in Russia, but China's government was not controlled by communists until 1949. Almost from the beginning, China's communist leader was Mao Zedong, whose interpretation of Marxism was very different from that of the Soviet leaders. **Maoism** shares Marx's vision of equality and cooperation, but Mao believed very strongly in preserving China's peasant-based society. Although the government sometimes emphasized industrialization during Mao's long rule, by and large Mao was interested in promoting a revolutionary fervor that strengthened agriculturally-based communities.



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After Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping instituted **market-based socialism**, which today allows for a significant infusion of capitalism into the system. China chose a relatively gradual and smooth infusion of capitalism controlled by the government, in contrast to the internal upheavals that broke the Soviet Union apart after Mikhail Gorbachev tried to resuscitate the economy during the late 1980s. Russia's rocky road to capitalism continued during the first years of the new regime, as Boris Yeltsin tried to privatize the economy through "shock therapy".

### GENDER RELATIONS IN COMMUNIST REGIMES

Marxists often see traditional gender relations – with women in subservient roles to men – as resulting from the underlying inequality encouraged by capitalist societies. Men exploit women through the family structure in much the same way that the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat in the workplace. Communism envisions complete economic, social, and political equality between men and women. As

we will see in Russia and China, this ideal was not followed in reality in any of the communist countries. However, it almost certainly increased opportunities for women, so that until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, women in communist countries were more likely to work outside the home than women in capitalist countries.

### COMMUNIST POLITICAL ECONOMY

Communist ideology led to political economies characterized by **central planning**, in which the ownership of private property and the market mechanism were replaced with the allocation of resources by the state bureaucracy. According to the basic tenets of Marxism, neither principle – ownership of private property nor the market economy – encourages equitable distribution of wealth. Countries with communist political economies have experienced these two problems:

- **Logistical difficulties** – Planning an entire economy is an extremely difficult task. The larger the economy, the more difficult the planning is and the less efficient the implementation isxxxx. In a market economy supply and demand interact spontaneously, and active management of an economy takes more work and energy.
- **Lack of worker incentives** – Capitalist countries often repeat this criticism of communist political economies. Workers have no fear of losing their jobs, and factories don't worry about going out of business, so there are few incentives for producing good quality products. In the absence of competition and incentives, innovation and efficiency disappear, and as a result, communist economies generally fall behind market economies.

In the case of the U.S.S.R., these problems were insurmountable, and they led to the dissolution of the Soviet Republics.

### NEW ECONOMIC TIES

Since Russia no longer has official ties to communism and China has now integrated capitalism into its economic system, just how important theoretical communism is to either country today is in question. New directions are indicated by both countries as they establish their roles in the global marketplace. In 2001 a chief economist of Gold-

man Sachs first coined the term “BRIC” for the fast-growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Goldman Sachs noted that the economies of the four countries are growing so fast that they might overtake the combined economies of the current richest countries of the world by 2050. In June 2009, the leaders of the BRIC countries held their first summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, where they discussed common concerns and demanded more say in global policymaking. At the time of their meeting, the economies of Brazil, India, and China were recovering from the global monetary crisis of September 2008, but the Russian economy was still plagued by plunging oil prices. Since then they have met in various cities in the BRIC countries.

South Africa sought BRIC membership beginning in 2009 and the process for formal admission began in 2010. South Africa was officially admitted as a BRIC nation on December 24, 2010 after being invited by China and the other BRIC countries to join the group, altering the acronym to BRICS. South African President Jacob Zuma attended the BRICS summit in Sanya in April 2011 as a full member.

Both China and Russia today have authoritarian governments, although Russia (as we will see) set up democratic structures in the Constitution of 1993. Both have integrated capitalism into their economic systems, although they have taken very different paths to reach that end, and both have become important players in international markets. How these economic changes will impact their political systems is an unfolding drama, as both countries test the western assumption that capitalism and democracy go hand in hand. So far, China and Russia appear to be setting their own rules, and it is far from clear that democratic principles will be a part of their future.

In the pages that follow, we will examine in more detail the influence of communism on Russia and China. For Russia, has communism now been successfully replaced with capitalism? In China, has the system strayed so far from Marxism that it can hardly be seen as communism today?

## IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

bourgeoisie  
BRIC  
central planning  
*The Communist Manifesto*  
co-optation  
democratic centralism  
Maoism  
market-based socialism  
Marxism  
Marxism-Leninism  
*nomenklatura*  
proletariat  
social mobility  
“vanguard of the revolution”





## CHAPTER FOUR: GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

### RUSSIA IN AN AGE OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Between 1945 and 1991, global politics was defined by intense competition between two superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States. The competition encompassed almost all areas of the world and affected a broad range of economic, political, social, and cultural patterns. As a result, when the Soviet Union surprisingly and suddenly collapsed in 1991, the reverberations were heard everywhere. In the wake of its demise, the component republics broke apart, leaving the Russian Federation as the largest piece, with a population cut in half, but with a land space that allowed it to remain geographically the largest country in the world.

The first president of the Russian Federation was **Boris Yeltsin**, a former member of the Soviet Politburo who declared the end of the old Soviet-style regime. The “**shock therapy**” reforms that he advocated pointed the country in the direction of democracy and a free-market economy. Yet Yeltsin was an uneven leader, often ill or under the influence of alcohol, who reverted to authoritarian rule whenever he pleased. A small group of family members and advisers effectively took control from the weakened president, and they ran the country as an **oligarchy**, granting themselves favors and inviting economic and political corruption. However, despite this development, a new constitution was put in place in 1993, and regular, sometimes competitive elections took place in the years that followed.

A new president, **Vladimir Putin**, was elected in 2000 and 2004 without serious conflict, but many observers are still wary of the continu-

ing influence of the oligarchy. Putin often acted aggressively in containing the oligarchs’ political and economic powers, and followed a clear path toward increasing centralization of power. As the election of 2008 approached, he followed the Constitution of 1993 by stepping down after two terms, but he announced his intention to stay on as prime minister under the new president, **Dmitri Medvedev**. Putin maintained control of the government while prime minister, and in 2012, he successfully ran for president again. Is Putin’s continuing influence in policymaking a signal that Russia is again becoming an authoritarian state and that its fling with democracy is now over?

Modern Russia, then, is a very unpredictable country. Its historic roots deeply influence every area of life, and Russia has almost no experience with democracy and a free market. Is the new structure set in place during the 1990s proof that the global trend toward democratization has influenced the Russian political system? Or perhaps it is possible that Russia is settling in as an illiberal democracy, with direct elections and other democratic structures in place, but with little hope of strengthening the democratic principles of civil liberties and rights, competitive political parties, rule of law, and an independent judiciary. However, Russia’s long history of autocratic rule certainly leaves open the third possibility that democracy has little chance to survive in Russia. No one knows at this point, but Russian history and political culture leave room for all three paths. Slavic roots provide a strong tendency toward autocratic rule, but the desire to modernize and compete for world power has been apparent since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, even though there is little evidence that current Russian leaders see democratization as a model for their country’s political development. One way to categorize Russia is as a “hybrid,” a system with some characteristics of a democracy, but with some strong authoritarian tendencies as well, although *The Economist’s* Democracy Index (p. 27) categorizes Russia as an authoritarian regime.

### SOVEREIGNTY, AUTHORITY, AND POWER

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public authority and political power emanated from one place: the Politburo of the Communist Party. The Politburo was a small group of men who climbed the ranks of the party through *nomenklatura*, an ordered path from local party soviets (com-

mittees) to the commanding heights of leadership. When the Soviet Union dissolved, its authority and power vanished with it, leaving in place a new government structure with questionable legitimacy. Still, the political culture and historical traditions of Russia are firmly entrenched and have shaped the genesis of the new regime, and undoubtedly will determine the nature of its future.

### Legitimacy

In the earliest years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the legitimacy of the Russian government was at very low ebb, partly because the regime change was so recent, and partly because the change appeared to be a drastic departure from the past. However, there is growing evidence that the system has stabilized since Vladimir Putin was first elected president in 2000, and since then, Putin and his successor, Medvedev, retreated from democratic practices to reestablish some of the old authoritarianism from Russia's traditional political culture.

Historically, political legitimacy has been based on strong, autocratic rule, first by centuries of **tsars**, and then by the firm dictatorship of party leaders during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under communist rule, **Marxism-Leninism** provided the legitimacy base for the party, with its ideology of **democratic centralism**, or rule by a few instead of the many. Although it theoretically only supplemented Marxism-Leninism, **Stalinism** in reality changed the regime to **totalitarianism**, a more complete, invasive form of strong-man rule than the tsars ever were able to implement. After Stalin, two reformers – Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev – tried to loosen the party's stranglehold on power, only to facilitate the downfall of the regime.

In an attempt to reconstruct the country's power base, the **Constitution of 1993** provided for a strong president, although the power of the position is checked by popular election and by the lower house of the legislature, the **Duma**. The institution of the presidency only dates to the late 1980s, but the Duma actually existed under the tsars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yeltsin attempted to strengthen the Constitution's legitimacy by requiring a referendum by the people to endorse its acceptance. In the 1990s, the Constitution's legitimacy was seriously tested by attempted coups and intense conflict between President Yeltsin and

the Duma. However, the 2000 presidential transition from Yeltsin to Putin went smoothly, an accomplishment that indicated that the Constitution is more resilient than it seemed to be during the 1990s. Under Putin's first two terms, government operations stabilized significantly, and the presidential transition from Putin to Medvedev went without incident, although Putin's retention of political power as the prime minister indicated that he continued to hold authoritarian control of the political system, as affirmed by his reelection as president in 2012.

### Historical Influences on Political Traditions

Several legacies from Russian history shape the modern political system:

- **Absolute, centralized rule** – From the beginning, Russian tsars held absolute power that they defended with brutality and force. One reason for their tyranny was geography: the Russian plain was overrun and conquered by a series of invaders, including Huns, Vikings, and Mongols. The chaos caused by these takeovers convinced Russian leaders of the importance of firm, unchallenged leadership in keeping their subjects in control. Centralized power also characterized the Communist regime of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many observers believe that Vladimir Putin has steered the country back to this style of leadership.
- **Extensive cultural heterogeneity** – Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century Russia was a relatively small inland culture, but even then, the numerous invasions from earlier times meant that the area was home to people of wide cultural diversity. This **cultural heterogeneity** intensified as Russia rapidly expanded its borders, until by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the empire stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Since then, the borders of Russia have been in an almost constant state of change, so that ethnicities have been split apart, thrown together with others, and then split apart again. The name "Russian Federation" reflects this diversity, with countless "republics" and "autonomous regions" based on ethnicity, but with borders impossible to draw along ethnic lines because of the blend and locations

of people. This heterogeneity has always been a special challenge to Russian rulers.

- **Slavophile v. Westernizer** – In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, American diplomat George Kennan identified this conflicting set of political traditions as a major source of problems for Russia. The Slavophile (“lover of Slavs”) tradition has led to a pride in Slavic customs, language, religion, and history that causes Russia to resist outside influence. This tendency to value isolation was challenged first by **Tsar Peter the Great** in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century. He used the western model to “modernize” Russia with a stronger army, a navy, an infrastructure of roads and communication, a reorganized bureaucracy, and a “**Window on the West**”. The window was St. Petersburg, a city built by Peter on newly conquered lands near the Baltic Sea. His efforts to build Russia’s power were followed by those of **Catherine the Great** of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, so that by the time of her death, Russia was a powerful major empire. However, their efforts set in place a conflict, since the affection for Slavic ways did not disappear with the changes.
- **Revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century** – The long, autocratic rule of the tsars suddenly and decisively came to an end in 1917 when **V. I. Lenin’s Bolsheviks** seized power, and renamed the country the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Communist leaders replaced the tsars, and they ruled according to socialist principles, although the tendency toward absolute, centralized rule did not change. The old social classes, however, were swept away, and the new regime tried to blend elements of westernization (industrialization, economic development, and technological innovation) with those of the Slavophile (nationalism, resistance to western culture and customs). A second revolution occurred in 1991, when the U.S.S.R. dissolved, and its fifteen republics became independent nations. The Russian Federation, born in that year, is currently struggling to replace the old regime with a new one, although many of the former republics have settled into authoritarianism.



**Comparative Geographic Sizes of Britain and Russia.** Geographically, Britain is still “Little England,” and Russia is still the largest country in the world in terms of land space, even after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

### Political Culture

Russia’s political culture has been shaped by its geographic setting, cultural orientation, and conflicting attitudes toward the state.

### Geographic Setting

Geographically, Russia is the largest country in the world and encompasses many different ethnicities and climates. Its republics and regions border the Black Sea in the southwest, the Baltic Sea in the northwest, the Pacific to the east, the Arctic Ocean to the north, and China to the south. Its borders touch many other nations with vastly different political cultures and customs. Russia is also one of the coldest countries on earth, partly because of northern latitude, but also because so many cities are inland. Ironically for a country of its size, warm water ports are few, and its history has been shaped by the desire to conquer countries that have blocked Russian access to the sea. Russia has many natural resources, including oil, gas, and timber, but much of it is locked in frozen Siberia, and very difficult to extract. However, in recent years these resources have been developed, and have fueled significant economic growth.



### Eastern Orthodoxy

Early in its history, Russians cast their lot with the flourishing city of Constantinople, establishing trade routes in that direction, and adopting the Eastern Orthodox religion. As Constantinople's influence waned and the influence of Western Europe increased, Russia's orientation meant that it did not share the values generated by the European Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment. Instead of individualism, Russians came to value a strong state that could protect them from their geographic vulnerabilities. In contrast to Russian **statism**, the West developed a taste for **civil society**, or spheres of privacy free from control by the state. Eastern Orthodoxy also was inextricably linked to the state, so the principle of separation of church and state never developed. Even when the Communist state forbid its citizens to practice religion, broad acceptance of government control remained.

### Equality of Result (contrasted to equality of opportunity)

The Communist regime instilled in the Russian people an appreciation for equality, a value already strong in a country of peasants with similar living standards. Russian egalitarianism has survived the fall of the Soviet Union, and most Russians resent wealth and income differences. This "equality of result" is very different from western "equality of opportunity" that sees "getting ahead" as a sign of initiative, hard work, and talent. As a result, the Russian political culture is not particularly conducive to the development of capitalism.

### Skepticism about Power

Despite their dependence on government initiative, Russian citizens can be surprisingly hostile toward their leadership. Mikhail Gorbachev found this out when in the late 1980s he initiated *glasnost* – a new emphasis on freedom of speech and press. As his reforms faltered, he received torrents of complaints from citizens that almost certainly contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union. Today surveys show that citizens have little faith in the political system, although, until recently, people seemed to have more confidence in Putin than in any other individual leaders or institutions. During his first two terms as president, Putin's approval ratings remained between 70 and 80

percent and even reached almost 90 percent in 2008, but no other public officials have had comparable approval rates, including governors of regions, army generals, Duma members, or the police. According to Russia's most respected polling outfit, the Levada Institute, Putin's popularity declined after the oil bust of 2008, but since 2011, his approval rating has still remained above 60 percent. The Russian people appear to have little confidence in nongovernmental leaders, such as entrepreneurs, bankers, and media personalities.

### The Importance of Nationality

Even though cultural heterogeneity has almost always been characteristic of the Russian political culture, people tend to categorize others based on their nationality, and they often discriminate against groups based on long-held stereotypes. Russians generally admire the Baltic people for their "civility" and sophistication, but they sometimes express disdain for the Muslim-Turkic people of Central Asia. In return, governments in those areas have passed laws discouraging Russians from remaining within their borders. Anti-Semitism was strong in tsarist Russia, and today some nationalists blame Jews for Russia's current problems.

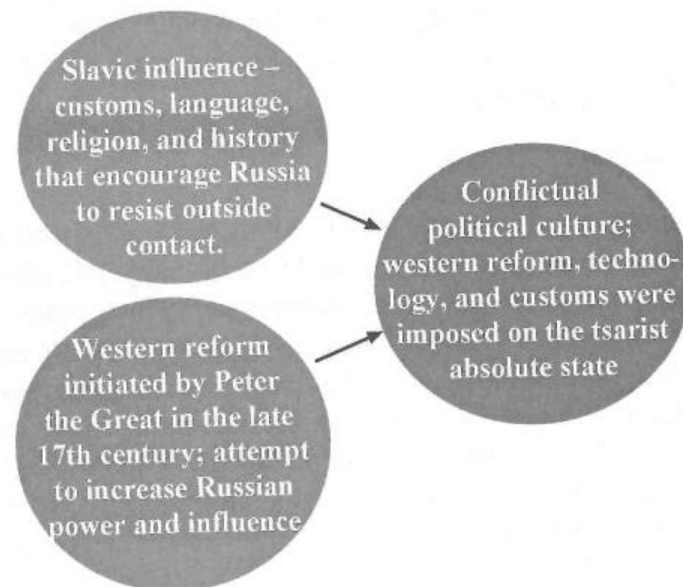
## POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

In contrast to Britain, Russia has almost always had difficulty with gradual and ordered change. Instead, its history reflects a resistance to change by reform and a tendency to descend into chaos or resort to revolution when contradictory forces meet. The most successful tsars, such as Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, understood the dangers of chaos in Russia, and often resorted to force in order to keep their power. The 19<sup>th</sup> century tsars faced the infiltration of Enlightenment ideas of democracy and individual rights, and those who tried reforms that allowed gradual inclusion of these influences failed. For example, Alexander II, who freed Russian serfs and experimented with local assemblies, was assassinated by revolutionaries in 1881. The forces that led to his assassination later blossomed into full-blown revolution, the execution of the last tsar, and the establishment of a communist regime. Likewise, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century tsars' attempts to gradually industrialize Russia were largely unsuccessful, but Joseph





### RUSSIA'S CONFLICTUAL POLITICAL CULTURE



Stalin's Five-Year Plans that called for rapid, abrupt economic change led to the establishment of the Soviet Union as one of two superpowers that dominated the world for a half century after the conclusion of World War II. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to reform the political and economic systems failed, and change again came abruptly with a failed coup d'état, and the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union.

Russia's history is characterized by three distinct time periods:

- **A long period of autocratic rule by tsars** – Tsars ruled Russia from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Control of Russia was passed down through the Romanov family from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, but transitions were often accompanied by brutality and sometimes assassination.
- **20<sup>th</sup> century rule by the Communist Party** – Communist rule began in 1917 when V.I. Lenin's Bolsheviks seized control of

the government after the last tsar, Nicholas II, was deposed. The regime toppled in 1991 when a failed coup from within the government created chaos.

- **An abrupt regime change to procedural democracy and a free market in 1991** – President Boris Yeltsin put western-style reforms in place to create the Russian Federation. Since 2000, Vladimir Putin has dominated Russian government and politics, limiting democratic reforms.

The two transition periods between the major time periods were sparked by revolution and quick, dramatic change. The Slavic influence has brought some continuity to Russia's history, but in general change has rarely been evolutionary and gradual. Instead, long periods of authoritarian rule have been punctuated by protest and violence.

#### Tsarist Rule

The first tsars were princes of Moscow, who cooperated with their 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongol rulers, and in return for their assistance were rewarded with land and power. But when Mongol rule weakened, the princes declared themselves "tsars" in the tradition of the "Caesars" of ancient Rome. The tsars were autocratic from the beginning, and tightly controlled their lands in order to protect them from invasion and attack. The tsars also headed the **Russian Orthodox Church**, so that they were seen as both political and religious leaders. Early Russia was isolated from western Europe by its orientation to the Eastern Orthodox world, and long distances separated Russian cities from major civilizations to the south and east.

#### Western Influence

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, **Tsar Peter the Great** introduced western technology and culture in an attempt to increase Russia's power and influence. From his early childhood, he was intrigued by the West, and he became the first tsar to travel to Germany, Holland, and England. There he learned about shipbuilding and other types of technology. He brought engineers, carpenters, and architects to Russia, and set the country on a course toward world power. **Catherine the Great**, who originally came from Germany, ruled Russia during

the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and managed to gain warm water access to the Black Sea, an accomplishment that had eluded Peter. Both looked to the West to help develop their country, but neither abandoned absolute rule. Catherine read widely, and was very interested in Enlightenment thought, but she checked any impulses she had to apply them to her rule. Instead, she became an **enlightened despot**, or one who rules absolutely, but with clear goals for the country in mind. Tsars after Peter and Catherine alternated between emphasizing Slavic roots and tolerating western style reform, although none of them successfully responded to the revolutionary movement growing within their country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Nineteenth Century Tsars

Russia was brought into direct contact with the West when Napoleon invaded in 1812. Alexander I successfully resisted the attack, but at great cost to the empire. Western thought influenced Russian intellectuals who saw no room for western political institutions to grow under the tsars' absolutism. Their frustration erupted in the **Decembrist Revolt of 1825**, which was crushed ruthlessly by Nicholas I. By mid-century the Russian defeat in the **Crimean War** convinced many of the tsar's critics that Russian ways were indeed backward and in need of major reform. Nineteenth century tsars reacted to their demands by sending the secret police to investigate and by exiling or executing the dissenters.

Of all the 19<sup>th</sup> century tsars, the only one who seriously sponsored reform was Alexander II. However, even though he freed Russia's serfs and set up regional *zemstvos* (assemblies), the increasingly angry *intelligentsia* did not think his actions went far enough. Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 by his critics, and his son Alexander III reacted by undoing the reforms and intensifying the efforts of the secret police.

### The Revolution of 1917, Lenin, and Stalin

The most immediate cause of the Revolution of 1917 was Russia's ineffectiveness in fighting the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. Tsar Nicholas II was indeed in the wrong place at the wrong time, but he also was a weak ruler who had no control over the armies. The first



### 19TH CENTURY TSARS: REFORM VS. REACTION

Decembrist Revolt —————> Suppression by Nicholas I

Defeat in Crimean War —————> Technological/military reform

Assassination of Alexander II —————> Suppression of dissidents by Alexander III

Western Enlightenment thought encouraged intellectuals to question tsarist rule; continuing conflict of Slavic vs. western values

signs of the revolution were in 1905, when riots and street fighting broke out in protest to Russian losses in the war with Japan. The tsar managed to put that revolution down, but the state finally collapsed in 1917 in the midst of World War I. Russian soldiers were fighting without guns or shoes, and mass defections from the war front helped send the state into chaos.

### Lenin and the Bolsheviks

By the 1890s, some of the revolutionists in Russia were **Marxists** who were in exile, along with other dissidents. However, according to Marxism, socialist revolutions would first take place not in Russia, but in capitalist countries like Germany, France, and England. At the turn of the century, Russia was still primarily an agricultural society with little industrial development. In his 1905 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*, **V. I. Lenin** changed the meaning of Marxism when he argued for **democratic centralism**, the idea of a "vanguard" leadership group that would lead the revolution because the people could not organize it themselves. Lenin believed that the situation in Russia was so bad that the revolution could occur even though it was a non-industrialized

society. Lenin's followers came to be called the **Bolsheviks**, and they took control of the government in late 1917. In 1922, Russia was re-named the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

In 1918, a civil war broke out between the **White Army**, led by Russian military leaders and funded by the Allied Powers, and the **Red Army** led by Lenin. The Reds won, and in 1920, Lenin instituted his **New Economic Policy**, which allowed a great deal of private ownership to exist under a centralized leadership. The plan brought relative prosperity to farmers, but it did not promote industrialization. Would Lenin have moved on to a more socialist approach? No one knows, because Lenin died in 1924 before his plans unfolded and before he could name a successor. A power struggle followed, and Joseph Stalin, the "Man of Steel", won control and led the country to the heights of totalitarianism.

### Stalinism

Stalin vastly changed Lenin's democratic centralism (also known as **Marxism-Leninism**). Stalin placed the Communist Party at the center of control, and allowed no other political parties to compete with it. Party members were carefully selected, with only about 7% of the population actually joining. Communists ran local, regional, and national governments, and leaders were identified and promoted through *nomenklatura*, or the process of party members selecting promising recruits from the lower levels. Most top government officials also belonged to the **Central Committee**, a group of party leaders who met twice a year. Above the Central Committee was the **Politburo**, the heart and soul of the Communist Party. This group of about twelve men ran the country, and their decisions were carried out by government agencies and departments. The head of the Politburo was the **general secretary**, who assumed full power as dictator of the country. Joseph Stalin was the general secretary of the Communist Party from 1927 until his death in 1953.

### *Collectivization and Industrialization*

Stalin's economic plan for the U.S.S.R. had two parts: **collectivization and industrialization**. Stalin replaced the small private farms of

the NEP with "**collective farms**" that were state run and supposedly more efficient. Private land ownership was done away with, and the farms were intended to feed workers in the cities who contributed to the industrialization of the nation. Some peasants resisted, particularly those who owned larger farms. These **kulaks** were forced to move to cities or to labor camps, and untold numbers died at the hands of government officials.

With the agricultural surplus from the farms, Stalin established his first **Five Year Plan**, which set ambitious goals for production of heavy industry, such as oil, steel, and electricity. Other plans followed, and all were carried out for individual factories by **Gosplan**, the Central State Planning Commission. Gosplan became the nerve center for the economy, determining production and distribution of virtually all goods in the Soviet Union.

**Stalinism**, then, is this two-pronged program of collectivization and industrialization, carried out by central planning, and executed with force and brutality.

### *Stalin's Foreign Policy*

During the 1930s Stalin's primary focus was internal development, so his foreign policy was intended to support that goal. He advocated "socialism in one country" to emphasize his split with traditional Marxist emphasis on international revolution, and he tried to ignore the fascist threat from nearby Germany and Italy. Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, only to be attacked by Germany the following year. Russia then joined sides with the Allies for the duration of World War II, but tensions between east and west were often apparent at conferences, and as soon as the war ended, the situation escalated into the Cold War. These significant shifts in foreign policy all accommodated his main goal: the industrial development of the U.S.S.R.

### *The Purges*

Joseph Stalin is perhaps best known for his purges: the execution of millions of citizens, including up to one million party members. He became obsessed with disloyalty in the party ranks, and he ordered



the execution of his own generals and other members of the Politburo and Central Committee. Stalin held total power, and by the time of his death in 1953, some speculated that he had gone mad. His successor, **Nikita Khrushchev**, set about to reform Stalinism by loosening its totalitarian nature and publicly denouncing the purges.

### Reform under Khrushchev and Gorbachev

After Stalin died in 1953, a power struggle among top Communist Party leaders resulted in the choice of Nikita Khrushchev as party secretary and premier of the U.S.S.R. In 1956 he gave his famous "**secret speech**", in which he revealed the existence of a letter written by Lenin before he died. The letter was critical of Stalin, and Khrushchev used it to denounce Stalin's rules and practices, particularly the purges that he sponsored. This denouncement led to **deStalinization**, a process that brought about reforms, such as loosening government censorship of the press, decentralization of economic decision-making, and restructuring of collective farms. In foreign policy, Khrushchev advocated "peaceful coexistence," or relaxation of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. He was criticized from the beginning for the suggested reforms, and his diplomatic and military failure in the Cuban Missile Crisis ensured his removal from power. Furthermore, most of his reforms did not appear to be working by the early 1960s. He was replaced by the much more conservative **Leonid Brezhnev**, who ended the reforms and tried to cope with the growing number of economic problems that were just under the surface of Soviet power.

After Brezhnev died in 1982, power fell to two short-lived successors, who were in turn replaced in 1985 by a reformer from a younger generation, **Mikhail Gorbachev**. Gorbachev was unlike any previous Soviet leader in that he not only looked and acted more "western", but he also was more open to western-style reforms than his predecessors, including Khrushchev. Gorbachev inherited far more problems than any outsider realized at the time, and many of his reforms were motivated by sheer necessity to save the country from economic disaster. His program was three-pronged:

- **Glasnost** – This term translates from the Russian as "openness"; it allowed more open discussion of political, social,

and economic issues as well as open criticism of the government. Although this reform was applauded by western nations and many Russians, it caused many problems for Gorbachev. After so many years of repression, people vented hostility toward the government that encouraged open revolt, particularly among some of the republics that wanted independence from Soviet control.

- **Democratization** – Gorbachev believed that he could keep the old Soviet structure, including Communist Party control, but at the same time insert a little democracy into the system. Two such moves included the creation of 1) a new Congress of People's Deputies with directly elected representatives and 2) a new position of "President" that was selected by the Congress. However, many of the new deputies were critical of Gorbachev, increasing the level of discord within the government.
- **Perestroika** – This economic reform was Gorbachev's most radical, and also his least successful. Again, he tried to keep the old Soviet structure, and modernize from within. Most significantly, it transferred many economic powers held by the central government to private hands and the market economy. Specific reforms included authorization of some privately-owned companies, penalties for under-performing state factories, leasing of farm land outside the collective farms, price reforms, and encouragement of joint ventures with foreign companies.

None of Gorbachev's reforms were ever fully carried out because the Revolution of 1991 swept him out of office.

### A Failed Coup and the Revolution of 1991

In August 1991, "conservatives" (those that wanted to abandon Gorbachev's reforms), several high-ranking Communist Party and government officials led a coup d'état that tried to remove Gorbachev from office. The leaders included the vice-president, the head of the KGB (Russian secret police), and top military advisers. The coup failed when popular protests broke out, and soldiers from the military



defected rather than support their leaders. The protesters were led by **Boris Yeltsin**, the elected president of the Russian Republic and former Politburo member. Yeltsin had been removed from the Politburo a few years earlier because his radical views offended conservatives. He advocated more extreme reform measures than Gorbachev did, and he won his position as president of the Russian Republic as a result of new voting procedures put in place by Gorbachev.

### MILESTONES IN RUSSIAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

- 988 C.E.** Russian Tzar Vladimir I converted to Orthodox Christianity, setting Russia on a different course of development from Western Europe.
- 1613** The Romanov family came to power and ruled until 1917.
- 1689-1725** Peter the Great ruled Russia, bringing the dynamic of "Slavophile vs. Westernizer" to Russian political development.
- 1762-1796** Catherine the Great, the second great Westernizer, solidified and expanded Peter's reforms, though she still ruled with an iron hand, as all Russian tsars did.
- 1917** The last tsar was deposed, and the Bolshevik Revolution put V. I. Lenin in control of the U.S.S.R.
- 1917-1921** The Russian Civil War raged as many factions inside and outside Russia fought to oust Lenin from power. Lenin solidified his power in 1921.
- 1927-1953** Joseph Stalin ruled the U.S.S.R., reinterpreting the meaning of communism and instituting his programs of collectivization and industrialization.
- 1991** A coup against General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev failed, but also instigated a process that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- 1993** The new Russian Constitution put in place the current regime.

Gorbachev was restored to power, but the U.S.S.R. only had a few months to live. By December 1991, eleven republics had declared their independence, and eventually Gorbachev was forced to announce the end of the union, which put him out of a job. The fifteen republics went their separate ways, but Boris Yeltsin emerged as the president of the largest and most powerful republic, now renamed the Russian Federation.

### The Russian Federation: 1991 to the Present

Once the Revolution of 1991 was over, Boris Yeltsin proceeded with his plans to create a western-style democracy. The old Soviet structure was destroyed, but the same problems that haunted Gorbachev were still there. The **Constitution of 1993** created a three-branch government, with a president, a prime minister, a lower legislative house called the **Duma**, and a **Constitutional Court**. Conflict erupted between Yeltsin and the Duma, and the Russian economy did not immediately respond to the "**shock therapy**" (an immediate market economy) that the government prescribed. Yeltsin also proved to be a much poorer president than he was a revolutionary leader. His frequent illnesses and alcoholism almost certainly explain the erratic behavior that led him to hire and fire prime ministers in quick succession. Yeltsin resigned in the months before the election of 2000, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin became acting president. Although Putin supported Yeltsin's reforms, he was widely seen as a more conservative leader who many hoped would bring stability to the newly formed government. As his presidency progressed, Putin retreated significantly from the commitments that Yeltsin had made to the establishment of a democratic system. The fact that he honored the Constitution of 1993 by stepping down as president at the end of his second term is countered by his remaining on as prime minister, and most believed that he still controlled policymaking in Russia. The Constitution allowed Putin to run for president again in 2012, and his decision to run shapes the path that Russia takes as it balances its authoritarian past with democratization trends of the present.

### CITIZENS, SOCIETY AND THE STATE

Russian citizens are affected by many contradictory influences from their political culture. When questioned, most say that they support the idea of a democratic government for Russia, although many do

not believe that one exists today. However, they also like the idea of a strong state and powerful political leaders, characteristics that help to explain the popularity of Vladimir Putin as a political leader.

### Cleavages

The Russian Federation has many societal cleavages that greatly impact policymaking, including nationality, social class, and rural/urban divisions.

#### Nationality

The most important single cleavage in the Russian Federation is **nationality**. Although about 80% of all citizens are Russians, the country includes sizeable numbers of Tatars, Ukrainians, Armenians, Chuvashes, Bashkis, Byelorussians, and Moldavians. These cleavages determine the organization of the country into a "federation," with "autonomous regions," republics, and provinces whose borders are based on ethnicity. Like the breakaway republics of 1991, many would like to have their independence, although most have trade benefits from the Russian government that induce them to stay within the Federation.

A notable exception is **Chechnya**, a primarily Muslim region that has fought for years for its freedom. The Russian government has had considerable difficulty keeping Chechnya a part of Russia, and the independence movement there is still very strong. In recent years, Chechens have been involved in terrorist acts, including the 2004 seizure of a school in southern Russia that resulted in gunfire and explosions that killed more than 350 people, many of them children. Almost certainly, other regions within Russia's borders are watching, and the government knows that if Chechnya is successful, other independence movements will break out in the country. In an effort to gain legitimacy for the Russian government in Chechnya, a referendum was held to vote on a new constitution for the region. The constitution was approved by the Chechen voters, even though it declared that their region was an "inseparable part" of Russia. With Putin's support, former rebel Ramzan Kadyrov became president of Chechnya in 2007, but the fighting has not stopped, with killings and kidnappings remaining quite common. Kadyrov has ruled Chechnya virtually as a

separate Islamic State, with his own 20,000-strong army, his own tax system, and his own religious laws. Some have criticized Putin for allowing Kadyrov such free reign, especially since many are suspicious that Kadyrov's men have been involved in murders, kidnappings, torture and extortion.

The entire area of the Caucasus is currently restive, and Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 increased tensions all across the region. In the summer of 2009, a suicide bomber tried to kill the president of Ingushetia, a republic that borders Chechnya, with a Chechen group involved in the Beslan school siege taking responsibility for the attack. Explosions and bombings increased all across the Caucasus later in the summer, and suicide attacks returned after a few years of relative calm.

Russian nationalists have taken responsibility for kidnappings, beatings and a 2006 bombing that killed 10 at a Moscow market operated mostly by immigrants. At least 37 people were killed and more than 300 injured in xenophobic attacks in 2010, according to the Sova center, a Moscow-based organization that tracks such violence. One of the most widely publicized cases came in December 2010, in the wake of a fatal shooting of an ethnic Russian soccer fan by a man from Russia's North Caucasus region. Thousands of young people began an extended riot close to Red Square, chanting "Russia for Russians" and racial slurs.

In 2014, Russia hosts the Winter Olympics in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, almost on the doorstep of insurgent unrest in the Caucasus. Security always had been tight in Sochi, where Mr. Putin has a presidential residence that he uses often and where he frequently hosts visiting foreign leaders. The government further tightened security before the games, which officially began February 7, 2014. The games proceeded without serious incident.

#### Religion

Tsarist Russia was overwhelmingly Russian Orthodox, with the tsar serving as spiritual head of the church. In reaction, the Soviet Union prohibited religious practices of all kinds, so that most citizens lost their religious affiliations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Boris Yeltsin en-

couraged the Russian Orthodox Church to reestablish itself, partly as a signal of his break with communism, but also as a reflection of old Russian nationalism. Today most ethnic Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, but they are still largely nonreligious, with only a small percentage regularly attending church services.

The growing acceptance of the church was demonstrated in 2007, when the Russian Church Abroad reunited with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Church Abroad had split off after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, vowing never to return as long as the "godless regime" was in power. In a meeting in 2003 in New York, Putin met with leaders of the church to assure them "that this godless regime is no longer there... You are sitting with a believing president." (*New York Times*, May 17, 2007). After the reunion in 2007, Moscow still retained ultimate authority in appointments and other church matters, and many critics say that the church is too much under government control.

Other religions are represented in small percentages – Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and Protestants. Since the current regime is

### RELIGION AND ETHNIC GROUPS IN RUSSIA

| RELIGION                  | ETHNIC GROUPS  |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Russian Orthodox 15 - 20% | Russian 7.7%   |
| Muslim 10 - 15%           | Tatar 3.7%     |
| Other Christian 2%        | Ukrainian 1.4% |
|                           | Bashkir 1.1%   |
|                           | Chuvash 1%     |
|                           | Other 10.2%    |

note: estimates are of practicing worshipers; Russia has large numbers of non-practice believers and non-believers, a legacy of Soviet rule

Reference: CIA World Factbook, 2006, 2010 estimates

relatively new and political parties have few ideological ties, no clear patterns have emerged that indicate political attitudes of religious vs. nonreligious citizens. However, in the past Russia has generally followed a pragmatic combination of authoritarianism and flexibility toward minorities.

One pattern worth noting is the rapid rise in the Muslim share of the population in recent years. Russia has more Muslims than any other European state except Turkey, and some estimates show as many as 20 million Muslims in the country. Muslims are concentrated in three areas:

1. **Moscow** – Muslims form a large share of laborers who have migrated to Moscow in recent years to find work.
2. **The Caucasus** – In this area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, many ethnicities (including Chechens) are Muslim. This area is often seen as a hot spot of trouble (along with Palestine, Kashmir, and Bosnia) for Muslims. The repression of Chechens, as well as intermittent violence in the entire region, was the biggest issue for Putin as he tried to cultivate Russia's role in global Muslim affairs. The region remains highly volatile today.
3. **Bashkortostan and Tatarstan** – Muslim relations with Russians are generally calmer in these two regions than in the Caucasus. Tatarstan's Muslim president, Mintimer Shaimiev, accompanied Mr. Putin around the Middle East in 2005, as the president tried to restructure Russia's image as a country supportive of Islam.

In 2013, the government conducted several crackdowns on radical Islamists, largely in preparation for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. In June 2013, the police arrested 300 Muslims in Moscow, 170 of whom were foreigners. The Muslims were found with extremist literature, Radio Free Europe reported, and were considered to be a threat. Putin said in a meeting of security force officers that the country must continue with the systematic arrests in order to "fight against corruption, crime and the insurgency."





**Muslims in the Caucasus Region of the Russian Federation.** Karachai-Cherkessia (92%), Kabardino-Balkariya (78%), Ingushetia (63%), Chechnya (91%), and Dagestan (85%) all have heavy concentrations of Muslims, a contributing factor to the persisting unrest in the region.

### Social Class

The Soviet attempts to destroy social class differences in Russia were at least partially successful. The old noble/peasant distinction in tsarist Russia was abolished, but was replaced by another cleavage: members of the Communist Party and non-members. Only about 7% of the citizenry were party members, but all political leaders were recruited from this group. Economic favors were granted to party members as well, particularly those of the Central Committee and the Politburo. However, egalitarian views were promoted, and the *nomenklatura* process of recruiting leaders from lower levels of the party was generally blind to economic and social background. Today Russian citizens appear to be more egalitarian in their political and social views than people of established democracies.

Observers of modern Russia note that a new socioeconomic class is developing within the context of the budding market economy: the *oligarchs* that have recently amassed fortunes from new business opportunities. Although the fortunes of many of these newly rich Russians were wiped away by the 1997 business bust, many survived and reemerged since then. Boris Yeltsin's government consolidated the new class by distributing huge favors to them, and a small

but powerful group of entrepreneurs sponsored the presidential campaign of Vladimir Putin in 2000. In the Putin era, oligarchs have come under fire for various alleged and real illegal activities, particularly the underpayment of taxes on the businesses they acquired. Vladimir Gusinsky (MediaMost) and Boris Berezovsky were both effectively exiled, and the most prominent, Mikhail Khodorkovsky (Yukos Oil), was arrested in October 2003, and sentenced to eight years in prison, with his company trying to protect itself from being dismantled. In 2011, his prison term was extended, but Putin pardoned him in late 2013.

### Rural/Urban Cleavages

Industrialization since the era of Joseph Stalin has led to an increasingly urban population, with about 73% of all Russians now living in cities, primarily in the western part of the country. The economic divide between rural and urban people is wide, although recent economic woes have beset almost all Russians no matter where they live. City dwellers are more likely to be well educated and in touch with western culture, but the political consequences of these differences are unclear in the unsettled current political climate.

### Beliefs and Attitudes

In the old days of the Soviet Union, citizens' beliefs and attitudes toward their government were molded by Communist Party doctrines. At the heart of these doctrines was **Marxism**, which predicted the demise of the capitalist West. This belief fed Russian nationalism and supported the notion that the Russian government and way of life would eventually prevail. The ideals of the revolutionary era of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century envisioned a world transformed by egalitarianism and the elimination of poverty and oppression. As **Stalinism** set in, the ideals shifted to pragmatic internal development, and many of the old tendencies toward absolutism and repression returned. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought out much hostility toward the government that is reflected in the attitudes of Russian citizens today.

- **Mistrust of the government** – Political opinion polls are very recent innovations in Russian politics, so information



about citizens' attitudes and beliefs toward their government is scarce. However, the limited evidence does reflect a great deal of alienation from the political system. Most polls show that people support democratic ideals, including free elections and widespread individual civil liberties and rights. However, most do not trust government officials or institutions to convert these ideals to reality. Alienation is also indicated by a low level of participation in interest groups, including trade unions and other groups that people belonged to in the days of the Soviet Union. An interesting bit of contradictory evidence, though, is the high level of approval that Vladimir Putin enjoyed during his first two terms. Even though his approval ratings have vacillated since 2008, they remain high, and other Russian public officials have not shared his relatively high level of popularity.

- **Statism** – Despite high levels of mistrust in government, Russian citizens still expect the state to take an active role in their lives. For most of Russian history, citizens have functioned more as subjects than as participants, and the central government of the Soviet Union was strong enough to touch and control many aspects of citizens' lives. Today Russians expect a great deal from their government, even if they have been disappointed in the progress of reform in recent years.
- **Economic beliefs** – Boris Yeltsin's market reforms created divisions in public opinion regarding market reform. Nearly all parties and electoral groups support the market transition, but those with more favorable opinions of the old Soviet regime are less enthusiastic. At the other end of the spectrum are those that support rapid market reform, including privatization and limited government regulation. The latter approach was favored by Yeltsin, and his "shock therapy" marketization was blamed by his critics for the steep economic decline that characterized the 1990s.
- **Westernization** – Political opinions follow the old divide of **Slavophile vs. Westernizer**. Some political parties emphasize

nationalism and the defense of Russian interests and Slavic culture. These parties also tend to favor a strong military and protection from foreign economic influence. On the other hand, reform parties strongly support the integration of Russia into the world economy and global trade.

Economic beliefs and attitudes toward the West also shape attitudes about whether or not the modern regime should integrate elements of the old Soviet government into its policymaking. Some citizens are nostalgic about the "good old days" when everyone had a guaranteed income, and they are most likely to support the Communist Party that still exists within the party system. Some observers see a generational split between those who remember better times under Soviet power, and those who have come of age during the early days of the Russian Federation.

### Political Participation

Russian citizens did actually vote during Soviet rule in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, their voting rate was close to 100% because they faced serious consequences if they stayed home. However, until Gorbachev brought about reforms in the late 1980s, the elections were not competitive, and citizens voted for candidates that were hand picked by the Communist leadership. Gorbachev created competitive elections in the Soviet Union, but because no alternate political parties existed yet, voter choice was limited to the designated party candidate vs. anyone from within party ranks who wanted to challenge the official candidate. In some cases, this choice made a real difference, because Boris Yeltsin himself was elected as an "alternate candidate" for president of the then Russian Republic.

### Protests

After the economic crisis of late 2008, a series of protests were organized around Russia to criticize the government's economic policies as the economy sank to its lowest point since 1997. The largest was in Vladivostok, in the far eastern part of the country, where about 1000 protesters marched through the streets in late January 2009. The Russian Communist Party organized a rally in Moscow and called for a return of the centralized economic policies of the Soviet Union. The au-

thorities approved the rally, and riot police officers watched the march but did not interfere. Other demonstrations against the government, as well as some in support, were held in several cities throughout the country, with none apparently turning violent.

Putin's decision to run for the presidency in 2012 sparked some of the largest protests in recent years. Protests broke out after the parliamentary elections in December 2011, with accusations that United Russia had rigged the elections. Then on the eve of the election in May, about 20,000 people protested in Moscow, according to a Reuters news report. Many were angry that Putin was extending his 12-year domination of Russia with another presidential term, as the crowd chanted "Russia without Putin" and "Putin - thief." Opposition leaders were arrested as violence broke out in several cities, including Vladivostok, the Urals city of Kurgan, and Kemerovo in western Siberia. Putin ignored the protests, and since then no major protests have been allowed.

Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian crisis caused much controversy, with many Russians supporting the government but others openly criticizing it. In early 2014, Boris Nemtsov, a leader of Russia's liberal opposition, was shot dead on a bridge by the walls of the Kremlin. A few days earlier, Mr. Nemtsov had been handing out leaflets for an anti-war rally to protest Russia's support of rebels in eastern Ukraine. The march turned into a memorial procession. Six days before Mr. Nemtsov's death, the Kremlin organized protest marchers bearing slogans denouncing Ukraine, the West, and Russian liberals. Alexei Navalny, another opposition leader, described the emergence of "pro-government extremists and terrorist groups" who openly fight the opposition.

#### Voter Turnout

Since 1991 voter turnout in the Russian Federation has been fairly high: higher than in the United States, but somewhat lower than turnout rates in Britain and France. Political alienation is reflected in the 50.3% rate in the 1993 Duma elections, but those elections followed a failed attempt by the Duma to take over the country. Voter turnout

in the Duma election in December 2003 was just under 56%; for the election in December 2007, the turnout was almost 64%; and for the 2011 election, the turnout was just over 60%. Meanwhile, voter turnout for presidential elections declined between 1991 and 2004, with almost 75% of eligible citizens voting in the first round election in 1991, and less than 65% voting in 2004. The turnout in the presidential election of 2008 was almost 70%, but the turnout for 2012 fell to just over 65%.

#### Civil Society

Despite the relatively high voter turnouts, participation in other forms of political activities is low. Part of this lack of participation is due to a relatively undeveloped **civil society**, private organizations and associations outside of politics. For example, most Russians don't attend church on a regular basis, nor do they belong to sports or recreational clubs, literary or other cultural groups, charitable organizations, or labor unions. Only about 1% report belonging to a political party. On the other hand, Russians are not necessarily disengaged from politics. Many report that they regularly read newspapers, watch news on television, and discuss politics with family and friends.

Civil society appears to be growing in Russia, although since Putin's reelection in 2012, the government appears to be imposing new restrictions. Before the 1917 Revolution, little civil society existed because of low economic development, authoritarianism, and feudalism. Soviet authorities argued that only the party could and should represent the people's interests, and so state-sponsored organizations appeared in a **state corporatist** arrangement with the government clearly in control of channeling the voice of the people. The Russian Orthodox Church was brought tightly under control of the Communist Party. With the advent of *glasnost* in the 1980s, however, civil society slowly began to emerge, and since that time many organizations have formed to express points of view on different issues, including the environment, ethnicity, gender, human rights, and health care.

Despite the proliferation of these groups, the government has placed severe restrictions on their activities, especially on groups that are openly critical of the government's policies. Rather than directly at-

tacking the groups, the government has used a number of tactics to weaken them, such as investigating sources of income, making registration with the authorities difficult, and police harassment. Since Putin's reelection in 2012, nonprofit groups have come under particular pressure with new laws that severely restrict foreign financing and require them to register as "foreign agents." In addition, the definition of high treason has been expanded to include assisting foreign organizations.

### Russian Youth Groups

As president, Vladimir Putin created a handful of youth movements to support the government. The largest is **Nashi**, and others are the Youth Guard and Locals. All are part of an effort to build a following of loyal, patriotic young people and to defuse any youthful resistance that could have emerged during the sensitive presidential election of 2008. Nashi organized mass marches in support of Mr. Putin and staged demonstrations over foreign policy issues that resulted in the physical harassment of the British and Estonian ambassadors. For example, after Estonia relocated a Soviet-era war memorial in April 2007, Nashi laid siege to the Estonian Embassy in Moscow, throwing rocks, disrupting traffic, and tearing down the Estonian flag. Members of the group attacked the Estonian ambassador, and her guards had to use pepper spray to defend her. In May 2011, some 50,000 members of Nashi gathered for a rally against corruption in downtown Moscow, where they concentrated on the corruption of government opponents, not on government officials. When anti-Putin protests broke out in late 2011, Nashi countered with rallies in support of Putin and United Russia.

Nashi's opponents deride the organization as a modern version of Komsomol, the youth wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Nashi receives grants from the government and large state-run businesses, so critics of the group see it as an arm of an increasingly authoritarian state.

### POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Russian history includes a variety of regime types, but the tradition is highly authoritarian. The reforms that began in the early 1990s are

truly experimental, and only time will tell whether democracy and a free market economy will take root. Even if they do, the nature of the regime must take into account Russian political culture and traditions. Current political parties, elections, and institutions of government are all new, and their functions within the political system are very fluid and likely to change within the next few years. However, the Russian Federation survived its first few rocky years, and many experts believe that at least some aspects of Russian government and politics are settling into a pattern.

Even though the Soviet Union was highly centralized, it still maintained a **federal government structure**. The Russian Federation has retained this model, and the current regime consists of eighty-nine regions, twenty-one of which are ethnically non-Russian by majority. Each region is bound by treaty to the Federation, but not all – including Chechnya – have signed on. Most of these regions are called "republics," and because the central government was not strong under Yeltsin, many ruled themselves almost independently. In the early 1990s, several republics went so far as to make claims of sovereignty that amounted to near or complete independence. Many saw the successful bid of the former Soviet states for independence as role models, and they believed that their own status would change as well. Chechnya's bid for independence and the war that followed are good examples of this sentiment. Some regions are much stronger than others, so power is devolved unequally across the country, a condition called **asymmetric federalism**.

As president, Vladimir Putin has cracked down on regional autonomy, ordering the army to shell even Chechnya into submission. Several measures that Putin imposed were:

- **Creation of super-districts** – In 2000 seven new federal districts were created to encompass all of Russia. Each district is headed by a presidential appointee, who supervises the local authorities as Putin sees fit.
- **Removal of governors** – A law allows the president to remove from office a governor who refuses to subject local law to the national constitution.



- **Appointment of governors** – Putin further centralized power in Moscow in late 2004 with a measure that ended direct election of the eighty-nine regional governors. Instead, the governors now are nominated by the president, and then confirmed by regional legislatures.
- **Changes in the Federation Council** – Originally the Federation Council (the upper legislative house) was comprised of the governors and Duma heads of each region. In 2002 a Putin-backed change prohibited these officials from serving themselves, although they were still allowed to appoint council members.
- **Elimination of single-member-district seats in the Duma** – Many minor political parties were able to capture Duma seats under the old rules that allowed half of the 450 seats to be elected by single-member districts and half by proportional representation. In 2005, Putin initiated a change to a pure proportional representation electoral system that eliminated candidates that were regionally popular. The new rules first applied to the election of 2007.

As a result of all these changes, the “federation” is highly centralized.

### Linkage Institutions

Groups that link citizens to government are still not strong in Russia, a situation that undermines recent attempts to establish a democracy. Political parties were highly unstable and fluid during the 1990s, and since Putin’s election in 2000, more power has concentrated in his party, so that after the parliamentary elections of late 2003 and presidential elections of early 2004, no strong opposing political parties were in existence. In the Duma elections of 2011, United Russia lost seats while opposition parties gained seats, but United Russia still managed to retain 238 of the 450 Duma seats. In the 2012 presidential race, Putin gained almost 64% of the vote, with his nearest opponent gathering only 17%. Interest groups have no solid footing in civil society since private organizations are weak, and the media has come more under government control.

### Parties

Most established democracies had many years to develop party and electoral systems. However, Russians put theirs together almost overnight after the Revolution of 1991. Many small, factional political parties ran candidates in the first Duma elections in 1993, and by 1995, 43 parties were on the ballot. Many of the parties revolved around a particular leader or leaders, such as the “Bloc of General Andrey Nikolaev and Academician Svyatoslav Fyodorov,” the “Yuri Boldyrev Movement,” or “Yabloko,” which is an acronym for its three founders. Others reflected a particular group, such as the “Party of Pensioners,” “Agrarian Party of Russia,” or “Women of Russia.” By 1999 the number of parties who ran Duma candidates had shrunk to 26, but many of the parties were new ones, including Vladimir Putin’s Unity Party. Needless to say, with these fluctuations, citizens have had no time to develop party loyalties, leadership in Russia continues to be personalistic, and political parties remain weak and fluid.

New election rules initiated by Vladimir Putin in 2005 solidified this trend toward fewer political parties. Before 2007, half of the Duma’s 450 seats were elected by proportional representation and half by single-member districts. The rules changed so that all seats – starting in the 2007 election – are elected by proportional representation, with all parties required to win a minimum of 7% of the national vote in order to win any seats. Smaller parties with regional support lost representation, and only four parties gained seats in the elections of 2007 and 2011: United Russia, the Communist Party, the Liberal Democrats, and A Just Russia.

### *United Russia*

The party was founded in April 2001 as a merger of Fatherland All-Russia Party, and the Unity Party of Russia. The Unity Party was put together by oligarch Boris Berezovsky and other entrepreneurs to support then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in the presidential election of 2000. The merger put even more political support behind Putin. United Russia won 221 of the 450 Duma seats in the election of 2003, although this figure underestimated the party’s strength since many minor parties were Putin supporters or clients. Putin, running as United Russia’s candidate, won the presidential election of 2004 with 71%



of the vote with no serious challengers from any other political parties. In the fall of 2007, Putin announced his willingness to head the party list at the general Duma election in 2007. Since Duma election rules had been changed at his initiative in 2005 to pure proportional representation, this move insured that he would be elected to the Duma, and so eligible to become prime minister. United Russia gained more than 64% of the vote in the election of 2007, which translated to 315 of the 450 seats in the Duma. Putin's hand-picked successor, Dmitri Medvedev, won the presidential election of 2008 with about 70% of the vote, and "chose" Putin as his prime minister.

Putin's decision to run for president in 2012 was controversial enough that United Russia lost seats (315 in 2007 compared to 238 in 2011) and Putin won the presidential election with 64% of the vote, as compared to Medvedev's 70% in 2008. Ideologically, United Russia is hard to define except that it is pro-Putin.

#### *The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)*

The Communist Party of the old Soviet Union survives today as the second strongest party in the Duma, even though it has not yet won a presidential election. After the election of 1995, it held 157 of the Duma's 450 members, and even though the party lost seats in the 1999 election, it remained an important force in Russian politics. However, the party's support dropped significantly in the parliamentary elections of 2003 and 2007, winning only 51 of the 450 Duma seats in 2003 and 57 in 2007. However, the party won 92 seats in 2011, benefitting from the discontent with Putin and United Russia. The party's leader, **Gennady Zyuganov**, came in second in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, but his percentage in the second round fell from 40.3% in 1996 to 29.21% in 2000. Zyuganov dropped out of the presidential election of 2004, and in July 2004, a breakaway faction led by Vladimir Tikhonov weakened the party further. In 2008, the party's candidate was again Zyuganov, who gained less than 18% of the vote, second to Medvedev's more than 70% of the vote. Zyuganov's share in 2012 was more than 17%, compared to Putin's almost 64%.

The CPRF is not like the old Communist Party, but it is far less reformist than other parties are. Zyuganov opposed many reforms during the Gorbachev era, and he continues to represent to supporters the stability of the old regime. The party emphasizes centralized planning and nationalism, and implies an intention to regain territories lost when the Soviet Union broke apart.

#### *Liberal Democrats*

This misnamed party is by far the most controversial. It is headed by Vladimir Zhirinovsky who has made headlines around the world for his extreme nationalist positions. He regularly attacks reformist leaders, and particularly disliked Yeltsin. He has implied that Russia under his leadership would use nuclear weapons on Japan, and he makes frequent anti-Semitic remarks (despite his Jewish origins). He has also brought the wrath of Russian women by making blatantly sexist comments. His party was reformulated as "Zhirinovsky's bloc" for the 2000 presidential election, when he received only 2.7% of the vote. The party did pick up seats in the 2003 Duma elections, receiving about 11% of the total vote, as well as 37 seats. The rule changes for the 2007 elections did not impact the party's representation significantly, although they won 40 seats, a gain of 3 over the 2003 election. In 2012, the party benefited from Putin's controversial power play, winning 56 seats.

#### *A Just Russia*

A Just Russia was formed in 2006 by the merger of Motherland People's Patriotic Union with the Party of Pensioners and the Party of Life. The party is led by the Speaker of the Federation Council Sergei Mironov. Motherland formed in 2003 with the merger of 30 organizations, but its leaders quarreled over whether or not to challenge Putin in the 2004 presidential race, and the party split in two, with one faction forming Fair Russia. The party passed the 7% threshold in the Duma election of 2007 with 7.74% of the vote, enough to gain them 38 seats. A Just Russia did much better in 2011, winning 64 Duma seats.

*Patriots of Russia*

During the regional elections of 2011, a party that few had heard of, Patriots of Russia, managed to win 8% of the vote, a surprising turn, even though United Russia won 70% of all seats. The Communist Party came in second with 13% of the seats, but the Patriots of Russia came in third. Analysts say the party was a Kremlin product, tested with a view to being deployed in the parliamentary election in December 2011. It describes itself as a party of "statists" and "patriots" that aims to build a "great and prosperous" Russia. Critics, however, say that its real purpose is to foil the Communist Party and A Just Russia, and that it is an integral part of the political system set up by the Kremlin. In the legislative election of December 2011, less than 1% of the electorate chose the Patriots of Russia, so the party did not win any Duma seats.

Overall, since 1993 ideological parties have faded in importance and have been replaced by **parties of power**, or parties strongly sponsored by economic and political power-holders. For example, United Russia is Putin's party, created by powerful oligarchs to get him elected. As long as Putin is in power, United Russia will be, too, especially since he was able to orchestrate who his successor would be in 2008. At the time of the election, Putin was tremendously popular, as was reflected in United Russia's landslide in the Duma elections of 2007. The two elections confirmed that the party of power remains the voters' choice. Even though Putin and United Russia lost some support in the elections of 2011 and 2012, they remained firmly in control of the government, with 238 of 450 seats in the Duma.

*Elections*

The Russian political system supports three types of national votes:

- **Referendum** – The Constitution of 1993 allowed the president to call for national referenda by popular vote on important issues. Even before the Constitution was written, Boris Yeltsin called for a referendum on his job performance. The people clearly supported his reforms, but his majorities were not overwhelming. The second referendum was held later in the year, and the people voted in favor of the new Constitution. A regional referendum was

held in Chechnya in 2003 to approve a constitution for the area. The constitution was approved, including the phrase that declared Chechnya to be an "inseparable part" of Russia.

- **Duma elections** – Russian citizens have gone to the polls six times to elect Duma representatives (1993, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011). The Duma has 450 seats, and until 2007, half were elected by proportional representation, and the other half by single-member districts. As of 2007, the 225 single-member districts were abolished, so that all Duma seats now are assigned exclusively by proportional representation. Also eliminated was the "against all" option that allowed voters to reject all candidates. Parties must get at least 7% (raised from 5% before 2007) of the total vote to get any seats according to proportional representation. The election changes were initiated by Putin, who argued that the new rules would reduce the number of parties in the Duma and thus make policymaking more efficient. Since 1993 parties have merged and disappeared, so that only a few have survived to the present.
- **Presidential elections** – Presidential elections follow the two-round model that requires the winning candidate to receive more than 50 percent of the vote. In 2000 Putin received 52.94% of the vote, so no run-off election was required, since he captured a majority on the first round. Communist Gennady Zyuganov received 29.21%, and no other candidates garnered more than 5.8%. Some observers have questioned the honesty of elections, particularly since the media obviously promoted Yeltsin in 1996 and Putin in 2000. A 2001 law seriously restricted the right of small, regional parties to run presidential candidates, so critics questioned how democratic future presidential elections might be. The presidential election of 2004 added credence to the criticism, since Vladimir Putin won with 71% of the vote, again requiring no run off. His closest competitor was Nikolay Kharitonov, who ran for the Communist Party and received less than 14% of the vote. In 2008 Putin was ineligible to run, but his chosen successor, Dmitri Medvedev, won the election with more than 70% of the vote. In 2012, Putin's share of the vote slipped to 64%, but he still managed to avoid a run-off election.

## DUMA ELECTIONS OF 2011

| PARTY              | % OF VOTES | SEATS | % OF SEATS |
|--------------------|------------|-------|------------|
| United Russia      | 49.32%     | 238   | 52.88%     |
| Communist Party    | 19.19%     | 92    | 20.46%     |
| A Just Russia      | 13.24%     | 64    | 14.21%     |
| Liberal Democrats  | 11.67%     | 56    | 12.45%     |
| Yabloko            | 3.43%      | 0     | -          |
| Patriots of Russia | .97%       | 0     | -          |
| Right Cause        | .60%       | 0     | -          |

Reference: Central Election Commission

**Duma Election Results of 2011.** The new election rules changed the makeup of the Duma primarily by eliminating representation from minority parties. Before 2007, many parties had regional support that allowed them to capture a few Duma seats, but the new rules eliminated single-member-district seats, so smaller parties received no representation. For example, in the 2003 elections Yabloko earned 4 seats, the Union of Right Forces gained 3, and the Agrarian Party earned 2. None captured any seats in 2007 or 2011.

## Interest Groups

Of course, interest groups were only allowed in the Soviet Union under **state corporatism** and were controlled by the government. Decision-making took place within the Central Committee and the Politburo, and if any outside contacts influenced policy, they generally were confined to members of the Communist Party. When market capitalism suddenly replaced centralized economic control in 1991, the state-owned industries were up for grabs, and those that bought them for almost nothing were generally insiders (members of the *nomenklatura*) who have since become quite wealthy. This collection of **oligarchs** may be defined loosely as an interest group because they

have been a major influence on the policymaking process during the formative years of the Russian Federation.

*The Oligarchy*

The power of the oligarchy became obvious during the last year of Boris Yeltsin's first term as President of the Russian Federation. The tycoons were tied closely to members of Yeltsin's family, particularly his daughter. Together they took advantage of Yeltsin's inattention to his presidential duties, and soon monopolized Russian industries and built huge fortunes. One of the best-known oligarchs was Boris Berezovsky, who admitted in 1997 that he and six other entrepreneurs controlled over half of the Russian GNP. Berezovsky's businesses had giant holdings in the oil industry and in media, including a TV network and many newspapers. He used the media to insure Yeltsin's reelection in 1996, and he and the family clearly controlled the presidency. When Yeltsin's ill health and alcoholism triggered events that led to his resignation in 2000, Berezovsky went to work with other oligarchs to put together and finance the Unity Party. When Unity's presidential candidate Vladimir Putin easily won the election with more than 50% of the vote in the first round, it looked as if the oligarchs had survived Yeltsin's demise.

Putin, however, has shown some resistance to oligarchic control. He has clashed with the entrepreneurs on several occasions, and when television magnate Vladimir Gusinsky harshly criticized Putin's reform plans, Gusinsky was arrested for corruption and his company was given to a state-owned monopoly. Both Berezovsky and Gusinsky are now in exile, but they still have close political and economic connections in Russia. In October 2003, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the richest man in Russia and chief executive officer of Yukos Oil Company, was arrested as a signal from Putin that the Russian government was consolidating power. The government slapped massive penalties and additional taxes on Yukos, forcing it into bankruptcy. In 2011, Khodorkovsky was sentenced to jail, this time for stealing oil, while during the first trial he was convicted for avoiding taxes on the sale of oil. In late 2013, Putin pardoned him, and he left the country.



The other oligarchs heeded the warning from Khodorkovsky's example and largely withdrew from political activities, leaving Putin in control but probably with a narrower base of support from economic leaders. However, as the Russian economy sank during the recession that began in late 2007, oligarchs have found themselves heavily in debt and have looked to the state for loans. Even though the government has been cash-strapped as well, the economic climate has the potential for weakening the power of the oligarchs and giving the government more control over them. Putin's choice for president, Dmitri Medvedev, was Chairman of Gazprom until he was elected president of the Russian Federation in May 2008, and he was replaced at Gazprom by Viktor Zubkov, the prime minister who was in turn replaced by Vladimir Putin.

### *State Corporatism*

Under Putin's leadership **state corporatism**, where the state determines which groups have input into policymaking, has become well established. The Russian government has established vast, state-owned holding companies in automobile and aircraft manufacturing, shipbuilding, nuclear power, diamonds, titanium, and other industries. If companies appear to be too independent or too rich the government has not forced owners to sell, but has cited legal infractions (such as with Yukos) to force sales. Either government-controlled companies, or companies run by men seen as loyal to Mr. Putin, are the beneficiaries. Another term for such an arrangement is **insider privatization**.

### *The Russian Mafia*

A larger and even more shadowy influence than the oligarchs is known as the "mafia",s but this interest group controls much more than underworld crime. Like the oligarchs, they gained power during the chaotic time after the Revolution of 1991, and they control local businesses, natural resources, and banks. They thrive on payoffs from businesses ("protection money"), money laundering, and deals that they make with Russian government officials, including members of the former KGB. They have murdered bankers, journalists, businessmen, and members of the Duma.

## STATE CORPORATISM IN RUSSIA

| State Owned Company                                       | Chairman   | Benefits   |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Gazprom</b><br>(natural gas)                           | Viktor A Zubkov<br>(former prime minister)                           | Sibneft oil company<br>Sakhalin II oil company<br>(controlling stakes)<br>Yukos Oil assets |
| <b>Vneshtorgbank</b><br>(VTB)                             | Andrei Kostin<br>(close friend of Putin and on the board of Rosneft) | International investment opportunities; funding for power generation                       |
| <b>Rosneft</b> (oil)                                      | Igor I. Sechin<br>(presidential deputy chief of staff)               | the Yuganskneftegaz oil fields (Yukos assets)<br>Refineries, oil fields from Yukos         |
| <b>Russian Technologies</b><br>(weapons, warfare systems) | Sergey Chemezov<br>(former KGB colleague of Putin)                   | Avtovaz, Russia's largest car maker<br>VSMPO, a titanium aircraft parts maker              |
| <b>United Aircraft Corporation</b>                        | Sergei B. Ivanov<br>(first deputy prime minister)                    | Company created in 2006 by presidential decree   |

**State Corporatism in Russia.** It is interesting to note that the former Chairman of Gazprom was Dmitri Medvedev, the president of Russia from 2008-2012. The chart also reflects Russia's **patron-client system**, where individuals in power give favors to subordinates, in return for political support.

The huge fortunes made by the oligarchs and mafia offend the sensibilities of most Russian citizens, who tend to value equality of result, not equality of opportunity. In Russia's past, lawlessness has been dealt with by repressive, authoritarian rule, and these groups represent a major threat to the survival of the new democracy.

## The Russian Media

For years the official newspaper of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, *Pravda*, only printed what government officials wanted it to, and so it became an important propaganda tool for the Communist Party. After the coup of 1991 and the dissolution of the country, *Pravda* continued as an independent newspaper with more freedom of the press than the country had ever allowed. Under Putin, the government again tightened its hold on the press, but *Pravda* has reinvented itself as a tabloid with a huge audience. Today it has little to fear from official censorship because its investigative journalism tends toward exposés of incompetent police work, corrupt low-level officials, and dirty train stations. Its biggest stories focus on celebrities, such as fashion models, radio hosts, and a hockey player hit with a cake. For serious journalists, however, who want to investigate the top layers of political power, it is a different story.

During a joint press conference with Vladimir Putin in early 2005, two Russian reporters challenged comments by U.S. President George Bush about the lack of a free press in Russia. Of course, the reporters were hand picked to accompany Putin on his trip to the United States, but they argued that the Russian media often criticizes the government. It is true that newspapers and television stations are now privately owned in Russia, although the state controls many of them. There are also many instances of reporters commenting on political actions and decisions, but how much real freedom they have is not clear. One example occurred when the Kremlin used a state-controlled company to take over the only independent television network, NTV. When the ousted NTV journalists took over a different channel, TV-6, the state shut it down. Russian media circles also were suspicious of the alleged poisoning of Anna Politkovskaya, one of the most outspoken critics of the government's policies in Chechnya. In March 2007 correspondent Ivan Safronov, who worked for the business daily *Kommersant*, died in a fall from the window of his Moscow apartment.

The status of freedom of the press in Russia is illustrated by media coverage of the school seizure at Beslan in 2004. As the tragedy unfolded on a Friday, two of Russia's main TV channels did not mention what was happening until an hour after explosions were first heard at

the school. When state-owned Russia TV and Channel One finally reported it, they returned to their regularly scheduled programs. However, NTV, which is owned by state-controlled Gazprom, did have rolling coverage for three hours, even though it started late.

State corporatism appears to impact the media business, just as it has oil, gas, aircraft building, and auto companies. For example, in May 2007 the Russian Union of Journalists was evicted from its headquarters in Moscow to make space for the Russia Today television channel. According to the general secretary of the RUJ, the eviction was based on an order from President Vladimir Putin to accommodate the expansion plans of the state-owned English-language channel, which aims to promote a positive image of Russia abroad. One newspaper, the *Novaya Gazeta*, has blatantly criticized the Russian government. Since 2000 five employees of *Novaya Gazeta* have died under violent or suspicious circumstances. The latest were in January 2009, when the newspaper's lawyer, Stanislav Markelov, and a young reporter, Aanstasia Baburova were fatally shot by a masked gunman. The editor, Dmitri Muratov, put two of his reporters under armed protection and instituted a policy that any article with sensitive information was to be published immediately, reducing the benefit of killing the reporters. No one blames the government directly for the attacks, but the message is clear: don't criticize the government.

The social media played an important role in the protests that surrounded the legislative election of 2011. One of the leaders, Aleksei Navalny, trained as a real estate lawyer, became famous before the election with his online exposés of corruption within state-owned companies. His following on Twitter and LiveJournal grew into the tens of thousands, and he summoned supporters to gather in protest of the Putin-dominated Duma elections. In 2013, Navalny went on trial for embezzling \$500,000 from a timber company that led to a five-year prison sentence. Putin critics claimed that Navalny was being punished because of his criticisms and because he announced his candidacy for mayor of Moscow shortly before his arrest.

## Institutions of Government

The current structure of the government was put in place by the Constitution of 1993. It borrows from both presidential and parliamen-

tary systems, and the resulting hybrid **semi-presidential** government is meant to allow for a strong presidency, but at the same time place some democratic checks on executive power. Its early history was stormy, but it is hard to say whether the difficulties centered on Yeltsin's ineffective presidency, or if they reflected inherent flaws within the system. The relationships among the branches have stabilized, but in Putin's and Medvedev's administrations the executive has clearly dominated the other branches, and Putin has commanded the executive branch.

### The President and the Prime Minister

The executive branch separates the **head of state** (the president) from the **head of government** (the prime minister). Unlike the Queen's role in British politics, the president's position has been far from ceremonial. Although the Constitution provided for a strong presidency, under Putin the president clearly came to dominate the prime minister. However, once Putin stepped aside to allow Dmitri Medvedev to run for and win the presidency and Putin became prime minister, the relationship between the two positions clearly changed, with Putin continuing to assert his influence. Since Putin's reelection in 2012, the president once again dominates the prime minister.

Russian voters directly elect the president for a six-year (starting in 2012) term, with a limit of two terms. Since Russian political parties are in flux, anyone who gets a million signatures can run for president. In 1996, 2000, and 2004, many candidates ran on the first ballot, and in 2000, 2004, and 2012, Putin won without a second-round vote. In 2008, Medvedev also won without a second-round vote. The president has the power to:

- **Appoint the prime minister and cabinet** – The Duma must approve the prime minister's appointment, but if they reject the president's nominee three times, the president may dissolve the Duma. In 1998, Yeltsin replaced Prime Minister Kiriyenko with Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the Duma rejected him twice. On the third round – under threat of being dissolved – they finally agreed on a compromise candidate, Yevgeni Primakov. Putin was prime minister when he ran for president, and when he became president, he appointed Mikhail Kasyanov as prime

minister. Kasyanov served for four years, and was eventually replaced by Mikhail Fradkov, and then Viktor Zubkov. Putin became prime minister in 2008, and in 2012, Medvedev switched places with Putin to become prime minister.

- **Issue decrees that have the force of law** – The president runs a cabinet that has a great deal of concentrated, centralized power. For example, Putin created the state-owned United Aircraft Corporation by decree, a decision that the legislature had no control over. According to the **Constitution**, the Duma has no real power to censure the cabinet, except that it may reject the appointment of the prime minister.
- **Dissolve the Duma** – This power was tested even before the Constitution was put in place. In 1993, Yeltsin ordered the old Russian Parliament dissolved, but the conservative members staged a coup, and refused to leave the "White House" (the parliament building). He ordered the army to fire on the building until the members gave up, but the chaos of the new regime was revealed to the world through the images of a president firing on his own parliament. No such chaos has occurred under Putin or Medvedev.

There is no vice-president, so if a president dies or resigns before his term is up, the prime minister becomes acting president. This situation occurred in 1999 when Prime Minister Putin took over presidential duties when Yeltsin resigned. Prime ministers are not appointed because they are leaders of the majority party (as they are in Great Britain); instead most have been career bureaucrats chosen for their technical expertise or loyalty to the president. However, during the four years when Medvedev was president and Putin took the prime minister's position, there is little doubt that Putin was still in charge, and so even though Medvedev was the head of state, policies did not change from those of Putin's presidency.

### A Bicameral Legislature

So far, the Russian legislature has proved to be only a very weak check on executive power. The lower house, the **Duma**, has 450 deputies, who since 2007, are all selected by proportional representation.





## THE RUSSIAN LEGISLATURE

### DUMA

450 deputies all selected by proportional representation (since 2007);  
 Passes bills, approves the budget, confirms president's political appointments;  
 Has limited power since president's party dominates and president has the power of decree;  
 Function is to provide popular representation

### FEDERATION COUNCIL

Two members from each of the 89 federal regions;  
 One representative selected by the governor and another by the regional legislature;  
 Function is to represent regions;  
 Has almost no power because the Duma may override the Council if it rejects legislation passed by the Duma

The Duma passes bills, approves the budget, and confirms the president's political appointments. However, these powers are very limited, since the president may rule by decree, and the Duma's attempts to reject prime ministers have failed. In another confrontation with Yeltsin, the Duma tried to use its constitutional power to impeach him, but the process is so cumbersome that it failed. Although the Duma has been controlled by Putin because his party (United Russia) has most of the seats, it still wields some power in the drafting of legislation. Most legislation originates with the president or prime minister, just as it does in Great Britain and most other parliamentary systems, but the Duma debates bills that must pass the deputies' vote before they become laws.

The upper house, called the **Federation Council**, consists of two members from each of the 89 federal administrative units. Since 2002 one representative is selected by the governor of each region and another by the regional legislature. The Federation Council serves the purpose that most upper houses do in bicameral federalist systems: to represent regions, not the population as such. However, like most

other upper houses in European governments, it seems to mainly have the power to delay legislation. If the Federation Council rejects legislation, the Duma may override the Council with a two-thirds vote. On paper, it also may change boundaries among the republics, ratify the use of armed forces outside the country, and appoints and removes judges. However, these powers have not been used yet.

### The Judiciary and the Rule of Law

No independent judiciary existed under the old Soviet Union, with courts and judges serving as pawns of the Communist Party. The Constitution of 1993 attempted to build a judicial system that is not controlled by the executive by creating a **Constitutional Court**.

The Court's nineteen members are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Federation Council, and it is supposed to make sure that all laws and decrees are constitutional. Under Putin, the court has taken care to avoid crossing the president. However, even the possibility that it might have independent political influence led Putin to propose moving the seat of the court to St. Petersburg, away from the political center in Moscow. The Constitution also created a Supreme Court to serve as a final court of appeals in criminal and civil cases. The court, though, does not have the power to challenge the constitutionality of laws and other official actions of legislative and executive bodies; the Constitutional Court has that power. Both courts have been actively involved in policymaking, although their independence from the executive is questionable. One problem is that many prosecutors and attorneys were trained under the Soviet legal system, so the judiciary currently suffers from a lack of expertise in carrying out the responsibilities outlined in the Constitution.

Vladimir Putin came into office with a mission to revive the great period of law reform under the tsars, including jury trial, planned for all regions except Chechnya by 2007. Russia brought in procedural codes for criminal and civil rights, and spent a great deal of money on law reform. However, the system is still very much in transition, and corruption is a serious problem. The advent of juries is a real change, but the presumption of innocence is far from a reality. The independence of the judiciary is still not apparent, especially since no courts

have challenged Putin in his pursuit of the oligarchs and the dismantling of their empires.

The trials of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, the former controlling shareholders of the Yukos Oil Company, indicate that the courts are still under the political control of Putin. Before the 2011 verdict was read that sentenced Khodorkovsky until 2019, Putin declared that the crime had been proven in court and that "a thief must stay in jail". Hillary Clinton, the U.S. secretary of state, protested, "Attempts to exert pressure on the court are unacceptable," causing Russia's foreign ministry to challenge her statement.

The Russian legal system has often been used as an instrument of the state's power, rather than as a tool for protecting citizens. In August 2013, three women from a feminist punk-rock group, Pussy Riot, were sentenced to two years each in prison for an anti-Putin stunt in a Moscow cathedral. In 2013, the Duma passed new laws that raised fines for unsanctioned demonstration and required foreign-funded non-governmental organizations to register as "foreign agents". Another law created a blacklist of offensive websites.

#### The Rule of Law and Corruption

Movement toward the rule of law continues to be blocked by corruption in state and society and by the political tradition of allowing the security police to continue to operate autonomously. In the Soviet period, domestic security was carried out by the **KGB** (State Security Committee), but since 1991 its functions have been split up among several agencies. The main domestic security agency is called the Federal Security Service, and no member or collaborator of the Soviet-era security services has been prosecuted for violating citizens' rights. Although the security police are generally regarded as one of the least corrupted of the state agencies, society-wide corruption is a major problem in Russia. One large-scale survey by a Moscow research firm found that at least half the population of Russia is involved in corruption in daily life. For example, people often pay bribes for automobile permits, school enrollment, proper health care, and favorable court rulings. This corruption not only impedes the development of rule of law; it also puts a drag on economic development, since so much money is siphoned off for bribes.

Putin initiated some high-profile battles against corruption in 2012, beginning with the dismissal of Anatoly Serdyukov as defense minister. He was fired after investigators linked a company spun off from the ministry to fraud, and state-run television publicly revealed that other high-level bureaucrats had misappropriated funds. However, corruption is so embedded in the Russian political system that these efforts have not gotten to the root of the problem, and corruption remains a stubborn problem that is very difficult to eliminate.

#### The Military

The army was a very important source of Soviet strength during the Cold War era from 1945 to 1991. The Soviet government prioritized financing the military ahead of almost everything else. The armed forces at one time stood at about 4 million men, considerably larger than the United States combined forces. However, the military usually did not take a lead in politics, and generals did not challenge the power of the Politburo. Even though some of the leaders of the attempted coup of 1991 were military men, the armed forces themselves responded to Yeltsin's plea to remain loyal to the government.

Under the Russian Federation, the army shows no real signs of becoming a political force. It has suffered significant military humiliation, and many sources confirm that soldiers go unpaid for months and have to provide much of their own food. Even as early as 1988, under Gorbachev, Soviet forces had to be withdrawn in disgrace from Afghanistan, and in 1994-1996, Chechen guerillas beat the Soviet forces. More recently, the army partially restored its reputation by crushing Chechen resistance in 1999-2000.

One prominent former general, **Alexander Lebed**, gained a political following before the election of 1996, and Yeltsin had to court his favor in order to win reelection. However, most political leaders have been civilians, so a military coup appears to be unlikely in the near future. Even so, some observers were wary of a military takeover, especially considering the tentative nature of the "democracy" during the 1990s.

Recently, Russia's army has reasserted its old vigor, with Putin's 2007 announcement that, for the first time in 15 years, the Russian Air Force

would begin regular, long-range patrols by nuclear-capable bombers again. The move was seen by some observers as one of several signs that Russia is rising in strength and wishes to assert its influence internationally again. Military spending has increased significantly over the past few years, and the invasion of Georgia in 2008 was successful, with soldiers who appeared to be better trained than those who fought in earlier wars in Chechnya. However, the armed forces rely on factories with outdated technology and production methods, and recruitment of personnel remains low.

### PUBLIC POLICY AND CURRENT ISSUES

The first few years of the Russian Federation were very difficult ones, characterized by a great deal of uncertainty regarding the regime's future. Any regime change creates legitimacy issues, but Russia's case was extreme, with public policy directed at some very tough issues and seemingly intractable problems. The abrupt change in leadership goals and style between Yeltsin and Putin also has made it difficult to follow continuous patterns in policy over the years, although alternating between reform and authoritarianism is an old theme that goes back to the days of the tsars.

#### The Economy

The Soviet Union faced many challenges in 1991, but almost certainly at the heart of its demise were insurmountable economic problems. Mikhail Gorbachev enacted his *perestroika* reforms, primarily consisting of market economy programs inserted into the traditional centralized state ownership design of the Soviet Union. These plans were never fully implemented, partly because dissent within the Politburo led to the attempted coup that destroyed the state.

Today leaders of the Russian Federation face the same issue: How much of the centralized planning economy should be eliminated, and how should the market economy be handled? Yeltsin's "shock therapy" created chaotic conditions that resulted in a small group of entrepreneurs running the economy. In 1997 the bottom fell out of the economy when the government defaulted on billions of dollars of debts. The stock market lost half of its value, and threatened to topple other markets around the globe. Meanwhile, the Russian people suf-

fered from the sudden introduction of the free market. Under the Soviet government, their jobs were secure, but now the unemployment rate soared. The ruble – once pegged by the government at \$1.60 – lost its value quickly, so that by early 2002, it took more than 30,000 rubles to equal a dollar. The oligarchs and mafia members prospered, but almost everyone else faced a new standard of living much worse than what they had before.

Between 1997 and 2007, the Russian economy steadily improved, particularly in the new areas of privatized industries, but it suffered a tremendous blow when oil prices plummeted in 2008. In 2004 the economy had shown strong indications of recovery, with a growth of about 7%, and the standard of living was rising even faster, although real incomes improved more rapidly in neighboring countries, such as Ukraine. For example, very few people, rich or poor, had running hot water for several weeks in the summer of 2007 in Moscow because the plants and network of pipelines shut down for maintenance every year. Although Russia ended 2008 with GDP growth of 6% – down only slightly from 10 years of growth averaging 7% annually – many economic problems presented themselves after the global economic crisis in September 2008. The Russian stock market dropped roughly 70%, as Russian companies were unable to pay loans called in as the market fell. The government responded with a rescue plan of over \$200 billion for the financial sector, and also proposed a \$20 billion tax cut plan for Russian citizens. Even so, the ruble fell in value, while unemployment grew and production dropped. Many people are still disillusioned with the new regime, and question the wisdom of current policymakers.

Russia's economy has been fueled by its huge oil and gas reserves, and the corporations (mostly state run) that own them. As long as oil prices remained high, Russia's GNP rose, and the economy was healthy. However, in 2014, the price of oil fell precipitously, and the Russian ruble lost about half its value, as confidence levels in the country's economic health plummeted. Investors pulled billions of dollars from Russia, and even though oil prices stabilized in 2015, they were still too low for an economic recovery. Inflation has jumped, wages have fallen, and foreign-exchange reserves of the Central Bank of Russia have fallen. Overall, the economy was shrinking, and without a sig-



nificant increase in oil prices, Russia's economic prospects remained grim.

A continuing economic issue is privatization vs. state control. In 2010, Medvedev announced plans to sell off up to \$100 billion of state assets. However, under Putin, the emphasis has shifted back to a state-capitalist model, with the government playing a strong role in the economy. State-owned companies, such as Rosneft (oil), Gazprom (natural gas), an Russian Technologies (weapons, warfare systems), all monopolize their industries, and many supporters of privatization claim that they block entrepreneurial efforts of smaller companies.

### Foreign Policy

The Soviet Union held hegemony over huge portions of the world for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and when it broke apart in 1991, that dominance was broken. The 1990s were a time of chaos and humiliation, as Yeltsin had to rely on loans from Russia's old nemesis, the United States, to help shake its economic doldrums. As the 21st century began, the new president, Vladimir Putin, set out to redefine Russia's place in the world, a two-dimensional task that required a new interpretation of the country's relationship with the west, as well as its role among the former Soviet States.

### The CIS

The weak **Commonwealth of Independent States** united the fifteen former republics of the Soviet Union, and Russia has been the clear leader of the group. However, the organization has little formal power over its members, and today only nine former republics remain tied to it. Russia's motives are almost always under strict scrutiny by the other countries. Still, trade agreements bind them together, although nationality differences keep the members from reaching common agreements. These nationality differences also threaten the Federation itself, with the threat of revolution from Chechnya spreading to other regions. In short, the CIS is a long way from being a regional power like the European Union, and many experts believe that the confederation will not survive.

A controversy erupted between Russia and Estonia in 2007 when the Estonian government removed a Soviet-era statue from a public place in its capital, Tallinn. The Estonian move met with a reaction from ethnic Russians living in Estonia, with hundreds of them attacking the main theater and the Academy of Arts in the capital. Events took a strange turn when computers went down all over Estonia the day after the protests. The Estonians accused Russia of orchestrating the computer attacks, and young protesters in Moscow reacted by attacking Estonia's embassy with eggs and harassing the Estonian ambassador. The old ethnicities of the culturally heterogeneous Soviet Union are still at odds, even though they are no longer united under one central government.



**The Troubled Caucasus Region.** The map above shows many points of conflict both within the Russian Federation and outside its borders. Chechnya has long been an area of conflict, where many still support Chechen independence from Russia. Georgia, now an independent country, has separatist problems of its own in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Russia has supported those regions in their attempts to break away from Georgia. A root of the conflict is the variety of small cultural groups that have long inhabited the area, and over the years hostilities have built up among them.

More recently, Russia's relationships with countries in the near abroad (former Soviet states) have been affected by its invasion of Georgia in 2008. Russian troops and armored vehicles rolled into South Ossetia, a "breakaway region" of Georgia that sought its independence. The move marked the growing aggressiveness of the Russian military, but it also reflected years of growing tensions between Georgia and Russia, especially between Georgia's president Mikheil Saakashvili and Putin. Georgia had long been viewed by Moscow as a wayward province, and after Georgia gained its independence when the Soviet Union fell apart, distrust grew, even though traditional bonds continued. However, Saakashvili allied Georgia with the United States, even naming a main road after George W. Bush. Russia responded by announcing its support for separatist regions of Georgia and then invaded South Ossetia and other areas of Georgia. A cease-fire agreement and a peace plan was brokered by Nicolas Sarkozy, the president of France and the European Union, but on August 26, 2008, Medvedev signed a decree recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia (another breakaway region) as independent states.

#### Crisis in the Ukraine

The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 into fifteen separate countries resulted in sovereignty issues, especially in regard to Russia's ongoing dominance of the region. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine has been particularly problematic, with conflicts erupting – often along ethnic lines – between Ukrainians who favor stronger ties to the West and those with allegiances to Russia. During the 2004 presidential election campaign in Ukraine, challenger Viktor Yushchenko accused Russian President Putin of providing financing and political advisors for Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich's campaign for the presidency. Putin himself went to Ukraine twice to campaign for Yanukovich. Popular protests broke out after Yanukovich won, with claims that the election was fraudulent. The elections were held again, and Yushchenko's victory in this round increased ethnic tensions within Ukraine.

Yanukovich eventually was elected president in 2010, but the Ukraine's internal and external tensions eventually led to his ouster

in 2014. In late 2013, Yanukovych rejected an agreement with the European Union that would bolster integration and trade between the EU and the Ukraine. Instead, he agreed to take a \$15 billion loan from Russia that would move the country toward a "Eurasian Union" with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. The decision sparked protests in Kiev by EU supporters, and clashes grew so violent that Yanukovych fled to Russia, and a coalition government formed that supported EU agreements. This turn of events led to opposition in Crimea, a region of Ukraine with a large number of ethnic Russians. Armed men, presumably Russian soldiers, in unmarked uniforms and masks seized airports and regional government buildings, and a new government of pro-Russian leaders decided to hold a referendum on Crimea's future in March 2014. The Russian parliament authorized deploying troops in Ukraine, and 97% of the voters in the extremely controversial referendum supported joining Russia. Putin signed a treaty formally annexing Crimea, and the U.S. and the EU ordered sanctions imposed on Russia. Fighting between government forces and pro-Russian separatists continued despite domestic and international efforts to de-escalate the crisis. However, in 2015, many Russian troops withdrew from Ukraine, fighting diminished, and the area settled into an uneasy peace.

#### Relations with the West

The biggest adjustment for Russia since 1991 has been the loss of its superpower status from the Cold War era. The United States emerged as the lone superpower in 1991, and the two old enemies – Russia and the United States – had to readjust their attitudes toward one another. U.S. Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton both believed that it was important to maintain a good working relationship with Russia. They also knew that the economic collapse of Russia would have disastrous results for the world economy. Both presidents sponsored aid packages for Russia, and they also encouraged foreign investment in the country's fledgling market economy. The United States and the other G-7 political powerhouses of Europe welcomed Russia into the organization, now known as the G-8, acknowledging the political importance of Russia in global politics. Russia supported France in blocking the U.N. Security Council's approval of the U.S.-sponsored

war on Iraq in early 2003. Whether the move was a wise one is yet to be seen, but it does indicate Russia's willingness to assert its point of view, even if it opposes that of the United States.

For almost two decades, Russia negotiated for membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), a powerful body responsible for regulating international trade, settling trade disputes, and designing trade policy through meetings with its members. Russia's bid to join the WTO finally succeeded in 2012, an event that almost certainly was a milestone in the country's integration with the international economic community. Putin hopes that the move will win more favorable trade terms for Russian companies and harness the nation's potential by attracting capital and diversifying the economy.

Russia's relations with countries of the West and the near abroad are strongly defined by the clout of its oil and gas industries. In an ongoing dispute about gas lines that cross Ukraine, Belarus, and other nearby countries, Russia's state-run gas company, Gazprom, has instituted gas price hikes that have been met by stiff resistance. In 2006, Gazprom reduced pressure in the Ukrainian pipeline system so that Ukrainian gas customers had no gas to use, even for basics, such as heating their homes. Europeans were affected because the pipelines eventually provide gas to them, and their governments put pressure on Putin's government until the pressure was restored.

Russia's relations with the European Union are sometimes undermined by individual countries pursuing their own interests, opening the way for Russia to play divide-and-rule, especially over energy. Russian leaders have also shown signs that they are more interested in maintaining their relationships with other fast-growing BRIC economies than they are in cooperating with the aging European countries. Still, Russia depends on the EU for half its trade, even though its trade with China has increased substantially in recent years.

After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, Putin's solidarity with the United States seemed to mark the beginning of a new era in Russian-American relations. However, the real breaking-point in Russia's relationship with America came after 2003. Putin saw America's invasion of Iraq as an intolerable encroachment on Russian national interests, and he condemned President Bush for telling other people how to live.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration insulted Russian pride by ignoring its relationship with the country, focusing instead on the war in Iraq. Tensions between the two countries escalated after Russia invaded South Ossetia in 2008. Putin had hoped that Bush would rein in Georgia's president as Saakashvili brushed off Russian prerogatives in the near abroad, and the attack affirmed Russia's strength.

In recent years, relationships between the United States and Russia have become more tense, especially after the crisis in Ukraine. In reaction to America's threat to sanction Russian officials directly involved in human rights abuses, the Kremlin banned American couples from adopting Russian orphans. The protests against the Duma election in December 2011 sparked anti-Americanism in Russia, with the Kremlin putting at least some of the blame on the United States. Under President Barack Obama, the United States has downplayed the importance of its relationship with Russia, almost certainly stoking even more anti-American feelings.

In recent years, Russia has encouraged international efforts to challenge America's global leadership. In the summer of 2015, Putin hosted the BRICS (Brazil, India, China, and South Africa) at a summit in the Russian city of Ufa. According to Russia's state media, the BRICS meeting was a new step in the construction of a counter-weight to the western financial system. Western countries are also concerned about Russia's naval expansion, especially its development of new types of conventional and nuclear-capable submarines. Some westerners fear that this new initiative might threaten NATO's control of western oceans.

### **Terrorism**

Just as has happened in the United States and Britain, Russia has had a number of acts of terror in recent years, with the Beslan school siege in southern Russia in 2004 being the most well known. Just prior to Beslan, a suicide bombing occurred near a subway station in Moscow, and bombs went off in two Russian airplanes almost simultaneously. As the government tried to break the Beslan siege by militants, 360 people died, many who were children. President Putin responded with a reform package to boost security. In an emergency gathering of



regional and national leaders in late 2004, Putin argued that only a tighter grip from the central government would foil terrorists whose aim it was to force the country's disintegration. He laid out not just security measures, but also a sweeping political reform – top officials (including regional governors) would no longer be directly elected, but would be selected by the president, and then approved by regional legislatures. The Duma approved the president's plan later in the year. Terrorist attacks in the Caucasus calmed for a few years, but reasserted themselves in the summer of 2009.

### Population Issues

In recent years, Russia has suffered a dramatic drop in its overall population. The population peaked in the early 1990s with about 148 million people, and the United Nations predicts that the country will fall to 116 million people by 2050, from the 141 million now, an 18% decline. The U.N. cites two reasons for the decline: a low birth rate and poor health habits. The low birth rate goes back to the Soviet era, when abortion was quite common and was used as a method of birth control. Economic hardship has not encouraged large families, and health issues have also created a very high death rate of 15 deaths per 1000 people per year, far higher than the world's average death rate of just under 9. Alcohol-related deaths in Russia are very high and alcohol-related emergencies represent the bulk of emergency room visits in the country. Life expectancy is particularly low for men at 59, as compared to women's life expectancy of 72. The difference is usually attributed to high rates of alcoholism among males.

A bit of good news came in late 2012, when new data showed that from January through October 2012 the Russian population naturally grew by about 800 people. Compared with the relevant period in 2011, births are up by 6.5% and deaths are down by 1.5%. Although the growth is very slight, it is the first time since 1992 that population hasn't actually declined.

To combat this overall decline the Russian government is encouraging Russians who live abroad to return to their homeland. Moscow has spent \$300 million since 2007 to get a repatriation program started, and official estimated that more than 25 million people were eligible.

Many are ethnic Russians who live in former Soviet republics, but the government is trying to attract people around the world. It is unclear how the financial crisis and Russia's recent economic woes have affected the program's appeal. However, economic issues have discouraged many Russians from expanding the size of their families.

### Re-centralization of Power in the Kremlin

Some critics believe that Putin's reforms for the Duma and the selection of regional governors are more than a response to terrorism, but are part of a re-centralization of power in the Kremlin. Putin's party now has 53% of the seats in the Duma, and his government has taken important steps toward controlling the power of the oligarchs. The Kremlin now controls major television stations, as well as the Russian gas giant Gazprom. It is not clear whether these moves mark the beginning of the end of democratic experimentation in Russia, or simply a reaction to terrorism similar to those of the U.S. and British governments after major attacks in those countries. Another possibility is that Russia is simply going through yet another of its age-old alternations between reform and conservatism.

The presidential election of 2008 also provided evidence that Russia's political power remains centralized, even though the presidential succession technically went according to the provisions of the Constitution of 1993. Dmitri Medvedev was hand-picked by Putin, and Putin's role as prime minister did not change the fact that he still was in charge of the Russian political system. Putin's reelection in 2012 insured that he would maintain control of policymaking until 2018.

### Development of a Civil Society

The notion of civil society starts with the acceptance of two areas of life: a public one that is defined by the government, and a private one, in which people are free to make their own individual choices. In a country with a strong civil society, people follow rules, operate with a degree of trust toward others, and generally have respectful dealings with others even if the government is not watching. Even though these ideals may not always be met, citizens are aware of both the rule of law in the public realm and their own privacy that exists outside it.

Democracy and capitalism both depend on civil society for their successful operation.

Russians do not necessarily share the assumptions that civil society rests on: the inherent value of life, liberty, and property. Instead, they have been much more influenced by traditions of **statism** – have a strong government or die. Their history began with this truth: survival amidst the invasions across the Russian plains and the rebellions of the many ethnicities depends on a strong, protective government. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russia became a superpower in the same way – through a strong, centralized government. Is it possible for stability, power, and prosperity to return to Russia through a democratic state and a capitalist economy?

In many ways the answer to that question tests the future of democracy as a worldwide political model. Were John Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers correct in their assumptions that it is in “human nature” to value freedom above equality? That people “naturally” have the right to own property and to live private lives? If so, can these values thrive among a people who have traditionally valued government protection and equality? So far, the spread of democracy has taken many forms. If it takes hold in the Russian Federation, it is indeed a hardy, versatile, and potentially global philosophy.

### IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

asymmetric federalism  
Berezovsky, Boris  
Bolsheviks  
boyars  
Catherine the Great  
Central Committee  
civil society in Russia  
collective farms, collectivization  
Commonwealth of Independent States  
conflict in Chechnya  
Constitution of 1993  
Constitutional Court  
Crimean War

CPRF  
cultural heterogeneity in Russia  
Decembrist Revolt  
decrees  
democratic centralism  
de-Stalinization  
Duma  
equality of result in Russia  
federal government structure  
Federation Council  
Five Year Plans  
general secretary  
glasnost  
Gorbachev, Mikhail  
Gorbachev's three-pronged reform plan  
Gosplan  
head of government, head of state  
Khrushchev, Nikita  
kulaks  
Lebed, Alexander  
Lenin, V.I.  
Liberal Democrats  
mafia  
Marxism-Leninism  
Medvedev, Dmitri  
Mensheviks  
nationality  
near abroad  
New Economic Policy  
*nomenklatura*  
oligarchy  
Patriots of Russia  
*perestroika*  
Peter the Great  
Politburo  
presidential-parliamentary system  
proportional representation in Russia  
Putin, Vladimir

Red Army/White Army  
 Russian Orthodox Church  
 "secret speech"  
 "shock therapy"  
 Slavophile vs. Westernizer  
 Stalinism  
 state corporatism  
 statism in Russia  
 totalitarianism  
 tsars  
 United Russia Party  
 "Window on the West"  
 Yobloko  
 Yeltsin, Boris  
*zemstvas*  
 Zhirinovsky, Vladimir  
 Zyuganov, Gennady

## Russia Questions

1. The tendency of Russian citizens to value the existence of a strong government to protect them is called
  - A) statism
  - B) perestroika
  - C) democratic centralism
  - D) corporatism
  - E) militarism
2. Which of the following appears to be a significant difference between the political views of Russian citizens and citizens of most established democracies?
  - A) Russians are more trusting of government officials.
  - B) Russians have less faith in competitive, regular elections.
  - C) Russians are less likely to be swayed by the charisma or popularity of their leaders.
  - D) Russians are more likely to believe in equality of result rather than equality of opportunity.
  - E) Russians have a narrower range of political ideologies; they tend to have attitudes to the "left" of center.
3. Which of the following is the BEST description of current Russian relationships with the near abroad?
  - A) Russia generally dominates trade agreements that bind the countries together.
  - B) Russia has almost no direct contact with countries in the near abroad.
  - C) The countries of the near abroad are still almost totally dependent on Russia both politically and economically.
  - D) Russia has much better relations with countries to the south than with those to the west.
  - E) Russian relationships between countries of the near abroad are virtually no different than those with countries in other areas.