

# 8

## The Russian Federation<sup>1</sup>

Joan DeBardleben

- SECTION 1** The Making of the Modern Russian State
- SECTION 2** Political Economy and Development
- SECTION 3** Governance and Policy-Making
- SECTION 4** Representation and Participation
- SECTION 5** Russian Politics in Transition



**Username:** Emily Jacobs**Book:** Introduction to Comparative Politics, 6th Edition. No part of any book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means without the publisher's prior written permission. Use (other than pursuant to the qualified fair use privilege) in violation of the law or these Terms of Service is prohibited. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

**Official Name:** Russian Federation (Rossiiskaia Federatsiia)

**Location:** Eastern Europe/Northern Asia

**Capital City:** Moscow

**Population (2009):** 141.9 million

**Size:** 17,075,200 sq. km.; approximately 1.8 times the size of the United States



## CHRONOLOGY of Soviet and Russian Political Development

**1918–1928**

Civil war, war communism, and the New Economic Policy

**1941–1945**

Nazi Germany invades Soviet Union; “Great Patriotic War”

**1965–1982**

The Brezhnev era and bureaucratic consolidation

**1929–1953**

Stalin in power

1915

1925

1935

1945

1955

1965

1975

**1917**

The Bolshevik seizure of power

**1929–1938**

Collectivization and purges

**1956–1964**

The Khrushchev era and de-Stalinization

**1953–1955**

Leadership change after Stalin's death

## SECTION 1

# THE MAKING OF THE MODERN RUSSIAN STATE

### Focus Questions

Consider three crucial junctures in Russian history. In what ways was each juncture a reaction to a recurring problem in Russian history?

What were Russia's principal challenges in the 1990s and how have they changed since the year 2000?

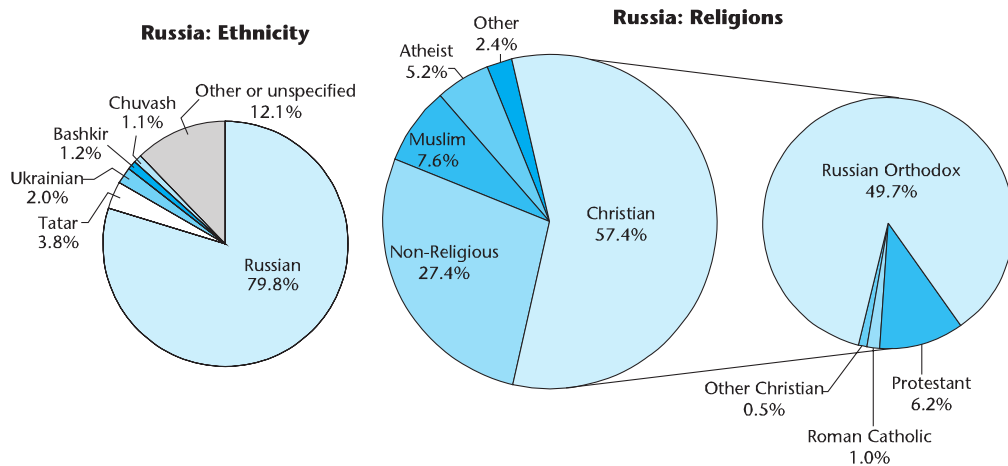
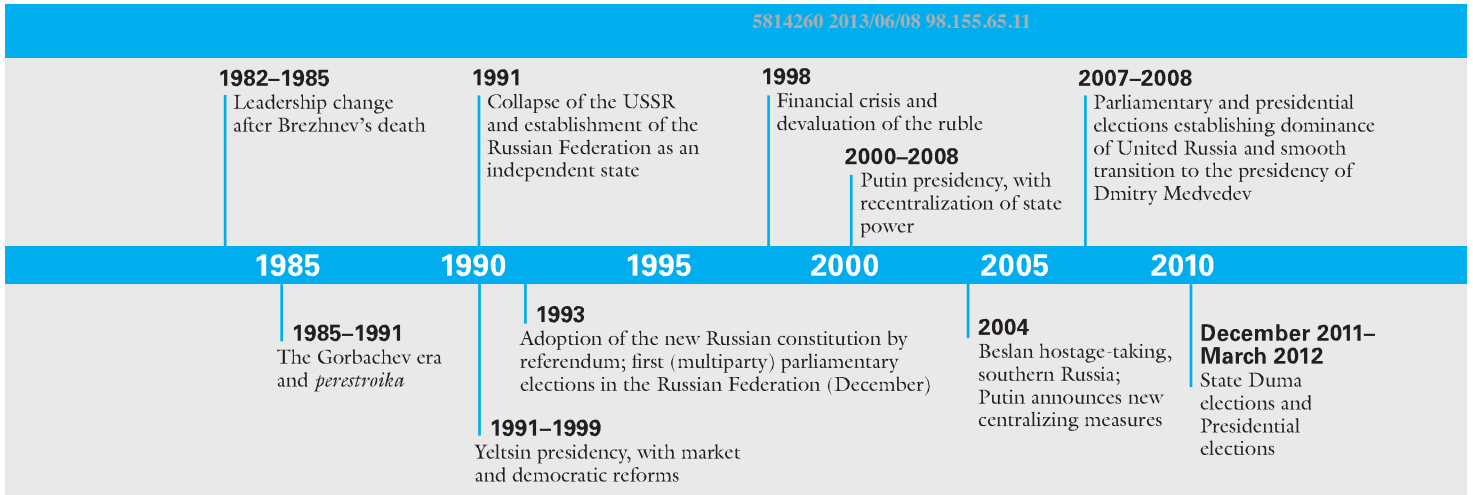
### Politics in Action

The town of Pikalyova, located about 150 miles southeast of St. Petersburg, Russia, and with only around 22,000 residents, suddenly became a well-known symbol among Russia's political elites following dramatic events in the spring of 2009. This industrial town represents a Soviet legacy, the so-called monocity—a relatively small urban settlement that is dependent for its survival on a single interdependent industrial complex. When the global financial/economic crisis of 2008–2009 hit, Pikalyovo lived from the production of three intertwined factories, one of them the linchpin—BaselCement Pikalyovo, owned by a powerful businessman, Oleg Deripaska. In spring 2009, the town began to experience difficulties because Deripaska's firm could no longer supply materials to the other two factories. The rupture sparked public protests when the city's heating and hot water supply was interrupted and wages weren't being paid; civil unrest spread, as residents blocked the federal highway and descended on city hall, demanding the resignation of the governor of the region. When Russia's prime minister, Vladimir Putin, arrived on the scene to deal with the crisis in early June, the country's elite watched. After some heavy-handed talks, local economic and political figures were cajoled to rustle up alternative supply sources, production was partially restored, and back wages were paid. With the prime minister's intervention, the crisis was contained.<sup>2</sup>

Pikalyovo came to be a power symbol. The crisis itself reflected the vulnerable position of Russia's inherited industrial legacy. Overall in 2009 over 200 mass-protest actions were inspired in one way or another by the economic crisis. Demands were primarily economic and only rarely mentioned political grievances. Nonetheless, the political leadership was clearly worried about the potential spread of the “Pikalyovo effect,”<sup>3</sup> and concessions were often offered preemptively to contain unrest elsewhere.

At the same time the Pikalyovo events exemplified the continuing interdependence of politics and economics in contemporary Russia: A crisis in a small provincial town required the personal attention of the country's top leaders.

5814260 2013/06/08 98.155.65.11



**Russian Currency**

Ruble  
International Designation: RUB  
Exchange Rate (2010): US\$1 = 30 RUB  
100 Ruble Note Design: Sculpture on the portico of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow



© 4780322454/Shutterstock.com

**FIGURE 8.1** The Russian Nation at a Glance

## Geographic Setting

After the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, fifteen newly independent states emerged on its territory. This section focuses on the Russian Federation, the largest successor state and the largest European country in population (141.9 million in November 2009)<sup>4</sup> and, in area, the largest country in the world, spanning eleven time zones.

Table 8.1	Political Organization
Political System	Constitutionally a presidential system
Regime History	Re-formed as an independent state with the collapse of communist rule in December 1991; current constitution since December 1993.
Administrative Structure	Constitutionally a federal system, with eighty-three subnational governments; politically centralized.
Executive	Dual executive (president and prime minister). Direct election of president; prime minister appointed by the president with the approval of the lower house of the parliament (State Duma).
Legislature	Bicameral. Upper house (Federation Council) appointed by heads of regional executive and representative organs. Lower house (State Duma) chosen by direct election, national proportional representation system with 450 deputies. Powers include proposal and approval of legislation, approval of presidential appointees.
Judiciary	Independent constitutional court with nineteen justices, nominated by the president and approved by the Federation Council, holding twelve-year terms with possible renewal.
Party System	Dominant establishment party (United Russia) within a multi-party system

Russia underwent rapid industrialization and urbanization under Soviet rule. Only 18 percent of Russians lived in urban areas in 1917, at the time of the Russian Revolution; 73 percent do now. Less than 8 percent of Russia's land is arable, while 45 percent is forested. Russia is rich in natural resources, concentrated in western Siberia and northern Russia. These include minerals (even gold and diamonds), timber, oil, and natural gas, which now form the basis of Russia's economic wealth.

Before the communists took power in 1917, the Russia's czarist empire extended east to the Pacific, south to the Caucasus Mountains and the Muslim areas of Central Asia, north to the Arctic Circle, and west into present-day Ukraine, eastern Poland, and the Baltic states. In the USSR the Russian Republic formed the core of a multiethnic state. Russia's ethnic diversity and geographic scope have made it a hard country to govern. Currently Russia faces pockets of instability on several of its borders, most notably in Tajikistan and Afghanistan in Central Asia, and in Georgia and Azerbaijan in the south. Russia's western neighbors include Ukraine, Belarus, and several member states of the European Union (EU), namely Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Located at a critical juncture between Europe, the Islamic world, and Asia, Russia's regional sphere of influence is now disputed.

## Critical Junctures

### The Decline of the Russian Tsarist State and the Founding of the Soviet Union

Until 1917, an autocratic system headed by the tsar ruled Russia. Russia had a **patrimonial state** that not only ruled the country but also owned the land.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the peasant population was tied to the nobles, the state, or the church

#### patrimonial state

A system of governance in which the ruler treats the state as personal property (patrimony).

(through serfdom). The serfs were emancipated in 1861 as a part of the tsar's effort to modernize Russia and to make it militarily competitive with the West.

The key impetus for industrialization came from the state and from foreign capital. Despite some reforms, workers became increasingly discontented, as did liberal intellectuals, students, and, later, peasants, in the face of Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese war and continued tsarist repression. Revolution broke out in 1905. The regime maintained control through repression and economic reform until March, 1917, during the height of World War I, when revolution deposed the tsar and installed a moderate provisional government. In November, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, overthrew that government.

### The Bolshevik Revolution and the Establishment of Soviet Power (1917–1929)

The Bolsheviks were Marxists who believed their revolution reflected the political interests of the proletariat (working class). Most revolutionary leaders, however, were not workers, but came from a more educated and privileged stratum, the intelligentsia. Their slogan, "Land, Peace, and Bread," appealed to both the working class and the discontented peasantry—over 80 percent of Russia's population.

The Bolshevik strategy was based on two key ideas: democratic centralism and vanguardism. **Democratic centralism** mandated a hierarchical party structure in which leaders were, at least formally, elected from below, but strict discipline was required in implementing party decisions once they were made. The centralizing elements of democratic centralism took precedence over the democratic elements, as the party tried to insulate itself from informers of the tsarist forces and later from real and imagined threats to the new regime. The concept of a **vanguard party** governed the Bolsheviks' relations with broader social forces. Party leaders claimed to understand the interests of working people better than the people did themselves. Over time, this philosophy was used to justify virtually all actions of the party and the state it dominated.

In 1922 the Bolsheviks formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the first communist party to take state power. Prior to this, the Bolsheviks had faced an extended civil war (1918–1921), when they introduced war communism, which involved state control of key economic sectors and forcible requisitioning of grain from the peasants. The *Cheka*, the security arm of the regime, was strengthened, and restrictions were placed on other political groups. By 1921, the leadership had recognized the political costs of war communism. In an effort to accommodate the peasantry, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1921 and lasted until 1928. Under NEP, state control over the economy was loosened so that private enterprise and trade were revived. The state, however, retained control of large-scale industry.

Gradually, throughout the 1920s, the authoritarian strains of Bolshevik thinking eclipsed the democratic elements. Lacking a democratic tradition and bolstered by the vanguard ideology of the party, the Bolshevik leaders were plagued by internal struggles following Lenin's death in 1924. These conflicts culminated in the rise of Joseph Stalin and the demotion or exile of other prominent figures such as Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin. By 1929 all open opposition, even within the party itself, had been silenced.

The Bolshevik revolution also initiated a period of international isolation; to fulfill their promise of peace, the new rulers had had to cede important chunks of territory to Germany under the Brest-Litovsk Treaty (1918), which were returned to Russia only after Germany was defeated by the United States, France, and Britain. However

#### democratic centralism

A system of political organization developed by V. I. Lenin and practiced, with modifications, by all communist party-states. Its principles include a hierarchical party structure.

#### vanguard party

A political party that claims to operate in the "true" interests of the group or class that it purports to represent, even if this understanding doesn't correspond to the expressed interests of the group itself.

these countries were hardly pleased with Russia's revolution, which led to expropriation of foreign holdings and which represented the first successful challenge to the capitalist order. The former allies sent material aid and troops to oppose the new Bolshevik government during the civil war.

### The Stalin Revolution (1929–1953)

From 1929 until his death in 1953, Joseph Stalin consolidated his power as Soviet leader. He brought changes to every aspect of Soviet life. The state became the engine for rapid economic development, with state ownership of virtually all economic assets. By 1935, over 90 percent of agricultural land had been taken from the peasants and made into state or collective farms. **Collectivization** was rationalized as a means of preventing the emergence of a new capitalist class in the countryside. But it actually targeted the peasantry as a whole, leading to widespread famine and the death of millions. Rapid industrialization favored heavy industries, and consumer goods were neglected. Economic control operated through a complex but inefficient system of central economic planning, in which the state planning committee (Gosplan) set production targets for every enterprise in the country. People were uprooted from their traditional lives in the countryside and catapulted into the rhythm of urban industrial life. Media censorship and state control of the arts strangled creativity as well as political opposition. The party/state became the authoritative source of truth; anyone deviating from the authorized interpretation could be charged with treason.

#### collectivization

A process undertaken in the Soviet Union under Stalin from 1929 into the early 1930s and in China under Mao in the 1950s, by which agricultural land was removed from private ownership and organized into large state and collective farms.

Gradually, the party became subject to the personal whims of Stalin and his secret police. Overall, an estimated 5 percent of the Soviet population was arrested at one point or another under the Stalinist system, usually for no apparent cause. Forms of resistance were evasive rather than active. Peasants killed livestock to avoid giving it over to collective farms. Laborers worked inefficiently. Absenteeism was high.

Isolation from the outside world was a key tool of the Stalinist system of power. But the policy had costs. While it shielded Soviet society from the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Soviet economy, protected from foreign competition, also failed to keep up with the rapid economic and technological transformation in the West.

In 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and Stalin joined the Allied powers. Casualties in the war were staggering, about 27 million people, including 19 million civilians. War sacrifices and heroism have remained powerful symbols of pride and unity for Russians up through the present day. After the war, the other Allied powers allowed the Soviet Union to absorb new territories into the USSR itself (these became the Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldavia, and portions of western Ukraine). The Allies also implicitly granted the USSR free rein to shape the postwar governments and economies in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Western offers to include parts of the region in the Marshall Plan were rejected under pressure from the USSR. Local Communist parties gained control in each country. Only in Yugoslavia were indigenous Communist forces sufficiently strong to hold power largely on their own and thus later to assert their independence from Moscow.

The USSR emerged as a global superpower as the Soviet sphere of influence encompassed large parts of Central and Eastern Europe. In 1947, the American president Harry Truman proclaimed a policy to contain further Soviet expansion (later known as the Truman Doctrine). In 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed involving several West European countries, the United States, and Canada, to protect against potential Soviet aggression. In 1955 the Soviet





Union initiated the Warsaw Pact in response. These events marked the beginning of the Cold War, characterized by tension and military competition between the two superpowers, leading to an escalating arms race that was particularly costly to the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union isolated its satellite countries in Central and Eastern Europe from the West and tightened their economic and political integration with the USSR. Some countries within the Soviet bloc, however, had strong historic links to Western Europe (especially Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary). Over time, these countries served not only as geographic buffers to direct Western contacts but also as conduits for Western influence.

### Attempts at De-Stalinization (1953–1985)

Even the Soviet elite realized that Stalin's terror could be sustained only at great cost. The terror destroyed initiative and participation, and the unpredictability of Stalinist rule inhibited the rational formulation of policy. From Stalin's death in 1953 until the mid-1980s Soviet politics became more regularized and stable. Terror abated, but political controls remained in place, and efforts to isolate Soviet citizens from foreign influences continued.

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, the new party leader, embarked on a bold policy of de-Stalinization, rejecting terror as an instrument of political control. The secret police (KGB) was subordinated to the authority of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and party meetings resumed on a regular basis. However, internal party structures remained highly centralized, and elections were uncontested. Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev (party head 1964–1982) partially reversed Khrushchev's de-Stalinization efforts. Controls tightened again in the cultural sphere. Individuals who expressed dissenting views through underground publishing or publication abroad were harassed, arrested, or exiled. However, unlike in the Stalinist period, the political repression was predictable. People generally knew when they were transgressing permitted limits of criticism.

From the late 1970s onward, an aging political leadership was increasingly ineffective at addressing mounting problems. Economic growth rates declined, living standards improved only minimally, and opportunities for upward career mobility declined. To maintain the Soviet Union's superpower status, resources were diverted to the military sector, gutting the consumer and agricultural spheres. An inefficient economic structure raised the costs of exploiting new natural resources. High pollution levels and alcoholism contributed to health problems. At the same time, liberalization in some Eastern European states and the telecommunications revolution made it increasingly difficult to shield the Soviet population from exposure to Western lifestyles and ideas. Among a certain critical portion of the population, aspirations were rising just as the capacity of the system to fulfill them was declining.

### Perestroika and Glasnost (1985–1991)

Mikhail Gorbachev took office as a Communist Party leader in March 1985. He endorsed a reform program that centered around four important concepts intended to spur economic growth and bring political renewal. These were *perestroika* (economic restructuring), *glasnost* (openness), *demokratizatsiia* (a type of limited democratization), and "New Thinking" in foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Gorbachev's reform program was designed to adapt the communist system to new conditions rather than to usher in its demise.

#### glasnost

Gorbachev's policy of "openness," which involved an easing of controls on the media, arts, and public discussion.

The most divisive issues were economic policy and demands for republic autonomy. Only half of the Soviet population was ethnically Russian in 1989. Once Gorbachev opened the door to dissenting views, demands for national autonomy arose in some of the USSR's fifteen union republics. This occurred first in the three Baltic republics (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), then in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova, and finally in the Russian Republic itself. Gorbachev's efforts failed to bring consensus on a new federal system that could hold the country together.

Gorbachev's economic policies failed as well. Half-measures sent contradictory messages to enterprise directors, producing a drop in output and undermining established patterns that had kept the Soviet economy functioning, although inefficiently. To protect themselves, regions and union republics began to restrict exports to other regions, despite planning mandates. In "the war of laws," regional officials openly defied central directives.

Just as his domestic support was plummeting, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1991. Under his New Thinking, the military buildup in the USSR was halted, important arms control agreements were ratified, and many controls on international contacts were lifted. In 1989, Gorbachev refused to prop up unpopular communist governments in the Soviet bloc in Central European countries. First in Hungary and Poland, then in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and Czechoslovakia, pressure from below pushed the communist parties out of power. To Gorbachev's dismay, the liberation of these countries fed the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union itself.

### **Collapse of the USSR and the Emergence of the Russian Federation (1991 to the Present)**

In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev drafted Boris Yeltsin into the leadership team as a nonvoting member of the USSR's top party organ, the Politburo. Ironically, later Yeltsin played a key role in the final demise of the Soviet Union. In June 1991 a popular election confirmed Yeltsin as president of the Russian Republic of the USSR (a post he had held since May of the previous year). In August 1991 a coalition of conservative figures attempted a coup d'état to halt Gorbachev's program to reform the Soviet system. While Gorbachev was held captive at his summer house (*dacha*), Boris Yeltsin climbed atop a tank loyal to the reform leadership and rallied opposition to the attempted coup. In December 1991, Yeltsin and the leaders of Ukrainian and Belorussian Republics declared the end of the Soviet Union, proposing to replace it by a loosely structured entity, the Commonwealth of Independent States.

As leader of the newly independent Russian Federation, Yeltsin took a more radical approach to reform than Gorbachev had done. He quickly proclaimed his commitment to Western-style democracy and market economic reform. However, that program was controversial and proved hard to implement. The executive and legislative branches of the government also failed to reach consensus on the nature of a new Russian constitution; the result was a bloody showdown in October 1993, after Yeltsin disbanded what he considered to be an obstructive parliament and laid siege to its premises, the Russian White House. The president mandated new parliamentary elections and a referendum on a new constitution, which passed by a narrow margin in December 1993.

Yeltsin embarked on a program of radical economic reform, which confronted Russians with an increasingly uncertain future marked by declining real wages, high inflation, and rising crime. Yeltsin's initial popularity was also marred by an extended military conflict to prevent Chechnya, a southern republic of Russia, from seceding