

Topic page:

Russia

Officially the Russian Federation, Rus. *Rossiya*, republic (2005 est. pop. 143,420,000), 6,591,100 sq mi (17,070,949 sq km). The country is bounded by Norway and Finland in the northwest; by Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine in the west; by Georgia and Azerbaijan in the southwest; and by Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China along the southern land border. The Kaliningrad Region is an exclave on the Baltic Sea bordered by Lithuania and Poland. [Moscow](#) is the capital and largest city.

Land and People

Major Geographic Features

The world's largest country by land area, Russia ranks sixth in terms of population. It occupies much of E Europe and all of N Asia, extending for c.5,000 mi (8,000 km) from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east and for 1,500 to 2,500 mi (2,400–4,000 km) from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Altai and Sayan mts., and the Amur and Ussuri rivers in the south. The Urals form the conventional geographic boundary between the European and Siberian parts of Russia. Russia's dominant relief features are (from west to east) the East European plain, the Urals, the West Siberian lowland, and the central Siberian plateau.

Mt. Elbrus (18,481 ft/5,633 m), in the Caucasus, is the highest peak in the country. The chief rivers draining the European Russia are the Don (into the Black Sea), the Volga (into the Caspian Sea), the Northern Dvina (into the White Sea), the Western Dvina (into the Baltic Sea), and the Pechora (into the Barents Sea). (For the main physical features of the Siberian Russia, see [Siberia](#).) The climate of Russia, generally continental, varies from extreme cold in N Russia and Siberia (where Verkhoyansk, the coldest settled place on earth, is situated), to subtropical along the Black Sea shore. The soil and vegetation zones include the [tundra](#) and [taiga](#) belts, the entire wooded [steppe](#) and northern black-earth steppes, and isolated sections of semidesert, desert, and subtropical zones. (For additional information, see the discussion of the nine physioeconomic regions under *Economy* below.)

Population and Ethnic Groups

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has experienced a decline in population. This is due in part to the difficult economic conditions the nation has endured, especially in the 1990s, which has led to a low birth rate, and to a reduced male life expectancy. The population drop has been slowed somewhat by immigration consisting mainly of ethnic Russians from other areas of the former Soviet Union.

There are at least 60 different recognized ethnic groups in Russia, but the vast majority of the population are Russians (80%). There are also Ukrainians (2%) and such non-Slavic linguistic and ethnic groups as Tatars (4%), Bashkirs, Chuvash, Komi, Komi-Permyaks, Udmurts, Mari, Mordovians, Jews, Germans, Armenians, and numerous groups in the Far North and in the Caucasus. Russian is the official language.

Political Subdivisions and Major Cities

Administratively, the Federation has generally relied on regional divisions inherited from the Stalin and Brezhnev constitutions of 1936 and 1977. Each area with a predominantly Russian population is constituted as a territory (kray) or region (oblast); some non-Russian nationalities are constituted, in descending order of importance, as republics, autonomous regions (oblasts), and autonomous areas (okrugs). Russia has 21 republics: Adygey, Altai, Bashkortostan, Buryat, Chechnya, Chuvash, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkar, Kalmykia, Karachay-Cherkess, Karelia, Khakass, Komi, Mari El, Mordovia, North Ossetia-Alania, Sakha, Tatarstan, Tuva, and Udmurt; one autonomous region (or oblast): Jewish (Birobidzhan); 4 autonomous national areas (okrugs): Chukotka, Khanty-Mansi, Nenets, and Yamalo-Nenets; 47 Russian regions (oblasts); 8 Russian territories (krays); and 2 federal cities (gorods; the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg). Oblasts and krays are roughly equivalent to provinces. In addition to Moscow, other major urban areas in Russia include [Saint Petersburg](#) (formerly Leningrad), [Nizhny Novgorod](#) (formerly Gorky), [Rostov-na-Donu](#), [Volgograd](#), [Kazan](#), [Samara](#) (formerly Kuybyshev), [Ufa](#), [Perm](#), [Yekaterinburg](#) (formerly Sverdlovsk), [Omsk](#), [Chelyabinsk](#), [Novosibirsk](#), and [Vladivostok](#).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, all of the former autonomous republics of the RSFSR were raised to full republic status, and four of the autonomous regions (Adygey, Altai, Karachay-Cherkess, and Khakass) were made full republics as well. Under President Putin, there have been moves toward consolidating the patchwork federal structure of the federation. In 2000 the administrative units of Russia were grouped into seven regional administrative districts. The federal districts (and their administrative centers) are Northwest (St. Petersburg), Central (Moscow), Volga (Nizhny Novgorod), North Caucasus (Rostov-na-Donu), Urals (Yekaterinburg), Siberia (Novosibirsk), and Russian Far East (Khabarovsk). In 2005, in the first of several planned mergers, the Perm region and Komi-Permyak Autonomous Area were unified as Perm Territory.

Religion and Education

The majority of Russia's population has no religious affiliation due to the antireligious ideology of the Soviet Union. The Russian Orthodox Church, headquartered in Moscow, has about 60 million adherents; the numbers have grown rapidly since the end of Soviet rule. There are also communities of Old Believers, a group that broke with the Orthodox Church in the 17th cent., as well as a large Muslim minority. Other religions include various Christian churches, Lamaist Buddhism, Judaism, and tribal religions. Partly in reaction to proselytizing by Protestant evangelicals, Mormons, and others, a 1997 Russian law granted superior status to the Russian Orthodox Church (and other older Russian religions).

Economy

General

The Russian Federation inherited a Marxist-Leninist command economy from the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](#) (USSR). Chief among the characteristics of the economy was an almost total absence of private productive capital. All enterprises were owned by the state, with each person receiving a salary for his or her efforts. Farmland was also almost entirely state-owned: 95% of all farmland was either state-owned or collectivized. All economic planning was done by government officials based in Moscow. Market forces played no part in their decision-making. The workforce was estimated at about 70 million persons in 1989.

During the [Gorbachev](#) era many of the basic elements of the Soviet command economy were weakened. The policies of [glasnost](#) and [perestroika](#) loosened social controls. Limited private ownership of businesses and land was granted, and prices were allowed to rise in accordance with market forces.

Following the failed [August Coup](#) and independence, the assets of the Communist party were seized and a new era of a market-based economy was proclaimed. Companies were given permission to become private entities, except for those enterprises employing over 10,000 workers or providing gas, oil, or pharmaceuticals. In 1991, Russia joined with other countries of the [Commonwealth of Independent States](#) (CIS) in a loose affiliation aimed in part at establishing a coordinated economic policy. The rapid change from a severely controlled system to the beginnings of a market economy created chaotic conditions; some Russians profited greatly, but most suffered economic hardship as privatization and other economic reforms progressed. By late 1997, inflation appeared to have been brought under control and industrial production had begun to slowly increase.

The country was once again plunged into economic upheaval, however, when the ruble plummeted in May, 1998, following a crisis in Asian financial markets. Unable to pay its foreign debts, Russia struggled to restructure loans and keep its new financial services sector from collapsing. By 2001, however, the Russian economy recovered and benefited from economic reforms and a rise in oil prices. In July, 2003, a law permitting the sale of farmland was passed by the parliament; foreigners are banned from purchasing agricultural land but may lease it. Privatization of state-owned companies has continued, but more slowly, and under President Putin the government has intervened more freely in economic affairs, for example, to solidify state ownership of Russia's energy industry. Because of this, foreign investment in the economy has remained relatively low. In 2006 the ruble became fully convertible when the government ended restrictions on currency transactions, and oil revenues enabled the government to pay off some \$23 billion in foreign debt ahead of schedule.

The Russian Federation possesses a well-developed road and rail network in its European third, a more limited network in Siberia, and still fewer roads and rail lines in the [Russian Far East](#). Barges on the vast network of inland waterways can carry a huge amount of traffic. In E Siberia, ships carry virtually all heavy freight. Most of Russia's cities and towns are connected by air. Exports are dominated by natural resources, particularly oil, natural gas, nickel, and timber; chemicals and military manufactures are also important exports. Imports include machinery and equipment, consumer goods, medicines, meat, sugar, and metal products. The main trading partners are Germany, Ukraine, China, and Italy.

Physioeconomically, the Russian Federation may be conveniently divided into 9 major regions: the Central European Region, the North and Northwest European Region, the Volga Region, the North Caucasus, the Ural Region, Western Siberia, Eastern Siberia, Northern and Northwestern Siberia, and the Russian Far East.

Central European Area

This flat, rolling country, with Moscow as its center, forms a major industrial region. Besides Moscow, major cities include Nizhniy Novgorod (formerly Gorky), Smolensk, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, Tula, Dzerzhinsk, and Rybinsk. Trucks, ships, railway rolling stock, machine tools, electronic equipment, cotton and woolen textiles, and chemicals are the principal industrial products. The Volga and Oka rivers are the major water routes, and the Moscow-Volga and Don-Volga canals link Moscow with the Caspian and Baltic seas. Many rail lines serve the area.

North and Northwest European Area

St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), the industrial center of this area, has industries producing machine tools, electronic equipment, chemicals, ships, and precision instruments. Other cities include Pskov, Tver (formerly Kalinin), Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, and Vologda. The hills, marshy plains, lakes, and desolate plateaus contain rich deposits of coal (Pechora Basin), oil (Ukhta), iron ore, and bauxite, and the area is a prime source of lumber. The chief water routes are the Baltic-Belomor Canal and the Volga-Baltic Waterway.

Volga

This area, stretching along the greatest river of European Russia, has highly developed hydroelectric power installations, including major dams at Volgograd, Kazan, Samara (formerly Kuybyshev), and Balakovo. Farm machinery, ships, chemicals, and textiles are manufactured, and extensive oil and gas fields are worked. Agricultural products include wheat, vegetables, cotton, hemp, oilseeds, and fruit. Livestock raising and fishing are also important.

North Caucasus

In this area, descending northward from the principal chain of the Caucasus Mts. to a level plain, are found rich deposits of oil, natural gas, and coal. The major cities are Rostov-na-Donu, Krasnodar, Grozny, Vladikavkaz, and Novorossiysk. Sochi is a popular resort. Farm machinery, coal, petroleum, and natural gas are the chief products. The Kuban River region, a fertile black-earth area, is one of the chief granaries of Russia. Wheat, sugar beets, tobacco, rice, and sunflower seeds are grown, and cattle are raised. Other rivers include the Don, the Kuma, and the Terek, and the Volga-Don Canal is a major transportation route.

Ural Area

The southern half of the Ural region has been a major center of Russian iron and steel production. A substantial share of Soviet petroleum was produced there, mainly in Bashkortostan. Deposits of iron ore, manganese, and aluminum ore are mined. The major industrial centers are Magnitogorsk, Yekaterinburg (formerly Sverdlovsk), Chelyabinsk, Nizhni Tagil, and Perm. Several trunk railroads serve the area, and rivers include the Kama and Belaya in the west and the Ural in the south.

Western Siberia

This vast plain—marshy and thinly populated in the north, hilly in the south—is of growing economic importance. At Novosibirsk and Kamen-na-Obi are large hydroelectric stations. Other principal cities include Kemerovo and Novokuznetsk. The Kuznetsk Basin in the southwest is a center of coal mining, oil refining, and the production of iron, steel, machinery, and chemicals. The Ob-Irtysh drainage system crosses this area, which is also served by the Trans-Siberian and South Siberian rail lines. Barnaul is a major rail junction. Agricultural products include wheat, rice, oats, and sugar beets, and livestock is raised.

Eastern Siberia

In this area of plateaus, mountains, and river basins, the major cities—Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, and Chita—are located along the [Trans-Siberian RR](#). A branch line links Ulan-Ude with Mongolia and Beijing, China. There are hydroelectric stations at Bratsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Irkutsk. Coal, gold, graphite, iron ore, aluminum ore, zinc, and lead are mined in the area, and livestock is raised.

Northern and Northeastern Siberia

Covering nearly half of Russian territory, this is the least populated and least developed area. The Ob, Yenisei, and Lena rivers flow to the Arctic. Through the use of atomic-powered icebreakers, the Northern Sea Route has gained increasing economic importance. The Kolyma gold fields are the principal source of Russian gold, and industrial diamonds are mined in the Sakha Republic, notably at Mirny. Fur trapping and hunting are the chief activities in the taiga and tundra regions.

Russian Far East

Bordering on the Pacific Ocean, the region has Komsomolsk, Khabarovsk, Yakutsk, and Vladivostok as its chief cities. Machinery is produced, and lumbering, fishing, hunting, and fur trapping are important. The Trans-Siberian RR follows the

Amur and Ussuri rivers and terminates at the port of Vladivostok.

Government

The Russian Federation is governed under the constitution of 1993, as amended. The head of state is a popularly elected president who is eligible to serve two consecutive four-year terms. The president appoints the prime minister and can dissolve the legislature if it three times refuses to approve his choice for that post. The legislature, or Federal Assembly, is divided into an upper Federation Council and a lower State Duma. The Federation Council has 178 members, consisting of two representatives from the governments of each republic, territory, region, and area. The State Duma has 450 members. The seats are distributed proportionally among those parties whose national vote is at least 7%. All legislators serve four-year terms. The Public Chamber, which was established in 2005, is empowered to investigate elected and appointed government officials and advise on national legislation. Its 126 members are appointed by the president or chosen by the members of the chamber from among prominent nongovernmental individuals. Administratively, the country is divided into 48 Russian regions, 21 ethnically non-Russian republics, seven autonomous national areas, seven largely Russian territories, the federal cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and one autonomous region.

History

The following article deals with the formation and history of the Russian state and empire until 1917 and after the formation of the contemporary Russian Federation in 1991. Information on the period from 1917 to 1991 can be found in the entry on the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](#). See also the table entitled [Russian and Soviet Rulers since 1462](#).

Early Russia

Numerous remains indicate that Russia was inhabited in the Paleolithic period. By the 7th cent. B.C. the northern shore of the Black Sea and the Crimea were controlled by the Scythians (see under [Scythia](#)); in the 3d cent. B.C. the Scythians were displaced by the Sarmatians (see under [Sarmatia](#)). Later the open steppes of Russia were invaded by numerous peoples, notably the Germanic Goths (3d cent. A.D.), the Asian Huns (4th cent.), and the Turkic [Avars](#) (6th cent.). The Turkic [Khazars](#) built up (7th cent.) a powerful state in S Russia, and the Eastern [Bulgars](#) established (8th cent.) their empire in the Volga region. By the 9th cent. the Eastern [Slavs](#) had settled in N Ukraine, in Belarus, and in the regions of Novgorod and Smolensk, and they had established colonies to the east on the Oka and upper Volga rivers. The chief Slavic tribes in S Russia were dominated by the Khazars.

The origin of the Russian state coincides with the arrival (9th cent.) of Scandinavian traders and warriors, the [Varangians](#). Tradition has it that one of their leaders, [Rurik](#), established himself peaceably at Novgorod by 862 and founded a dynasty. The name *Russ* or *Rhos* possibly originally designated the Varangians, or some of them, but it was early extended to the Eastern Slavs and became the name of their country in general. Rurik's successor, [Oleg](#) (reigned 879-912), transferred (882) his residence to Kiev, which remained the capital of [Kievan Rus](#) until 1169. He united the Eastern Slavs and freed them from Khazar suzerainty, and signed (911) a commercial treaty with the Byzantine Empire. Under [Sviatoslav](#) (reigned 964-72) the duchy reached the peak of its power.

Christianity was made the state religion by [Vladimir I](#) (reigned 980-1015), who adopted (988-89) the Greek Orthodox rite. Thus Byzantine cultural influence became predominant. After the death of [Yaroslav](#) (reigned 1019-54), Kievan Rus was divided in a rotation system among his sons. Political supremacy shifted, passing from Kiev to the western principalities of Halych and Volodymyr (see [Volodymyr-Volynskyy](#) and [Volhynia](#)) and to the northeastern principality of Suzdal-Vladimir (see [Vladimir](#)). In 1169, Kiev was stormed by the Suzdal prince Andrei Bogolubsky (reigned 1169-74), who made Vladimir the capital of the grand duchy. In 1237-40 the Mongols (commonly called [Tatars](#)) under Batu Khan invaded Russia and destroyed all the chief Russian cities except Novgorod and Pskov. In S and E Russia the Tatars established the empire of the [Golden Horde](#), which lasted until 1480.

[Belarus](#), most of the [Ukraine](#), and part of W Russia were incorporated (14th cent.) into the grand duchy of [Lithuania](#). Thus NE Russia became the main center of economic and political life. At the end of the 13th cent. Tver was the most important political center, but in the 14th cent. the Muscovite princes of the grand duchy of Vladimir, although still tributary to the Tatars, began to consolidate their position. Under Ivan I (Ivan Kalita; reigned 1328-41), Moscow took precedence over the other cities. After the victory of [Dmitri Donskoi](#) (reigned 1359-89) over the Tatars at [Kulikovo](#) in 1380, the grand duchy of Vladimir was bequeathed, without the sanction of the Golden Horde, to his son Vasily (reigned 1389-1425), and its rulers began to be called grand dukes of Moscow or Muscovy (see [Moscow, grand duchy of](#)).

Consolidation of the Russian State

Under Ivan III (1462-1505) and his successor, [Vasily III](#) (1505-33), the Muscovite state expanded, and its rulers became more absolute. The principality of Yaroslavl was annexed in 1463 and Rostov-Suzdal in 1474; Novgorod was conquered in 1478, Tver in 1485, Pskov in 1510, and Ryazan in 1521. The Mari, Yurga, and Komi were subjugated at the end of the 14th

cent., and the Pechora and Karelians at the end of the 15th cent. Ivan ceased to pay tribute to the Tatars, and in 1497 he adopted the first code of laws. Having married the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, Ivan considered Moscow the "third Rome" and himself heir to the tradition of the Byzantine Empire.

In 1547, at the age of 17, [Ivan IV](#) (Ivan the Terrible; reigned 1533–84) was crowned czar of all Russia. He conquered the Tatar khanates of [Kazan](#) (1552) and [Astrakhan](#) (1556), establishing Russian rule over the huge area of the middle and lower Volga; thus he laid the basis for the colonization and annexation of [Siberia](#), begun by the Cossack [Yermak](#) in 1581. The conquered border territories were colonized by Russian settlers and defended by the [Cossacks](#). At home, Ivan crushed the opposition of the great feudal nobles—the boyars—and set up an autocratic government. After the reign of the sickly Feodor I (1584–98), state power passed to Boris [Godunov](#) (reigned 1598–1605), who was elected czar by a *zemsky sobor* [national council].

With the death of Boris in 1605 began the "Time of Troubles" —a political crisis marked by the appearance of pretenders (see [Dmitri](#)) and the intervention of foreign powers. In 1609, [Sigismund III](#) of Poland invaded Russia, and in 1610 Polish troops entered Moscow according to an agreement concluded with the boyars. However, in 1612, Russian forces led by Prince [Dmitri Pozharski](#) took Moscow, and in 1613 a *zemsky sobor* unanimously chose Michael Romanov as czar (see [Michael](#); reigned 1613–45). Thus began the [Romanov](#) dynasty, which ruled Russia until 1917. Michael was succeeded by [Alexis](#) (reigned 1645–76), who gained E Ukraine from Poland.

Russia in the 17th cent. was still medieval in culture and outlook, and it was not regarded as a member of the European community of nations. In its economic development it was centuries behind Western Europe; distrust of foreign ways and innovations kept its inhabitants ignorant and isolated. The consolidation of central power was effected not with the help of the almost nonexistent middle class or by social reforms but by forcibly depriving the nobility and gentry of their political influence. The nobles were compensated with land grants and with increasing rights over the peasants. Thus serfdom (see [serf](#)), which became a legal institution in Russia in 1649, included growing numbers of persons and became increasingly oppressive. The process of enserfment, which reached its peak in the 18th cent., resulted in several violent peasant revolts, notably those led by [Stenka Razin](#) (1667–71) and by [Pugachev](#) (1773–75).

Empire and European Eminence

During the reign (1689–1725) of [Peter I](#) (Peter the Great) Russian politics, administration, and culture were altered considerably. However, the trend of increased autocracy and enserfment of peasants was accelerated by the changes. Peter, who assumed (1721) the title of emperor, "Westernized" Russia by using stringent methods to force on the people a series of reforms. He created a regular conscript army and navy. He abolished the patriarchate of Moscow (see [Orthodox Eastern Church](#)) and created (1721) the Holy Synod, directly subordinate to the emperor, thus depriving the church of the last vestiges of independence. He recast the administrative and fiscal systems, creating new organs of central government and reforming local administration, and he also founded the first modern industries and made an attempt to introduce elements of Western education.

Seeking to make Russia a maritime power, Peter acquired [Livonia](#), [Ingermanland](#) (Ingria), [Estonia](#), and parts of Karelia and Finland as a result of the [Northern War](#) (1700–1721), thus securing a foothold on the Baltic Sea. As a symbol of the new conquests he founded (1703) [Saint Petersburg](#) on the Gulf of Finland and transferred (1712) his capital there. Russia was rapidly becoming a European power. Peter also began the Russian push to the Black Sea, taking [Azov](#) in 1696, but his war with Turkey from 1711 to 1713 ended in failure and the loss of Azov. In addition, he sent (1725) [Vitus Bering](#) on an exploratory trip to NE Siberia.

The [Russo-Turkish Wars](#) of the next two centuries resulted in the expansion of Russia at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and in the growing influence of Russia on Ottoman affairs (see [Eastern Question](#)). Russia also took an increasing part in European affairs. The immediate successors of Peter the Great were [Catherine I](#) (reigned 1725–27), [Peter II](#) (reigned 1727–30), [Anna](#) (reigned 1730–40), and [Ivan VI](#) (reigned 1740–41). Empress [Elizabeth](#) (reigned 1741–62) successfully sided against Prussia in the [Seven Years War](#), but her successor, [Peter III](#), took Russia out of the war.

Peter's wife successfully seized power from him (1762), and when he was murdered shortly thereafter she became empress as [Catherine II](#) (Catherine the Great; reigned 1762–96). Under her rule Russia became the chief power of continental Europe. She continued Peter I's policies of absolute rule at home and of territorial expansion at the expense of neighboring states. The three successive partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795; see [Poland, partitions of](#)), the annexations of the [Crimea](#) (1783) and of [Courland](#) (1795), and the treaties of [Kuchuk Kainarji](#) (1774) and [Jassy](#) (1792) with Turkey gave Russia vast new territories in the west and south, including what is now Belarus, parts of Ukraine W of the Dnieper River, and the Black Sea shores. Catherine's administrative reforms further centralized power. The suppression of [Pugachev's](#) rebellion strengthened the privileged classes and lessened the chances of social reform. However, under her "enlightened despotism," Russian writers, scientists, and artists began the great creative efforts that culminated in the late 19th and early 20th cent.

Russia became involved in the French Revolutionary Wars under Catherine's successor, the demented [Paul I](#), who was murdered in 1801. His son, [Alexander I](#) (reigned 1801–25), joined the third coalition against Napoleon I, but made peace with France at Tilsit (1807) and annexed (1809) [Finland](#) from Sweden. In wars with Turkey and Persia, Alexander gained [Bessarabia](#) by the Treaty of Bucharest (1812) and Caucasian territories by the Treaty of [Gulistan](#) (1813). In 1812, Napoleon began his great onslaught on Russia and took Moscow, but his army was repulsed and nearly annihilated in the winter of that year. Napoleon's downfall and the peace settlement (see [Vienna, Congress of](#)) made Russia and Austria the leading powers on the Continent at the head of the [Holy Alliance](#).

Reaction, Reform, and Expansion

Liberal ideas gained influence among the Russian aristocracy and educated bourgeoisie despite Alexander I's growing intransigence. They found an outlet in the unsuccessful Decembrist Conspiracy of 1825 (see [Decembrists](#)), which sought to prevent the accession of [Nicholas I](#). Under Nicholas (reigned 1825–55), Russia became the most reactionary European power, acting as the "policeman of Europe" in opposing liberalism and helping Austria to quash the Hungarian revolution (1848–49). Russian [Poland](#), nominally a kingdom ruled by the Russian emperor, lost its autonomy after an unsuccessful rising there in 1830–31.

A clash of interests between Russia and the Western powers over the Ottoman Empire led to the [Crimean War](#) (1854–56), which revealed the inner weakness of Russia. [Alexander II](#) (reigned 1855–81), who acceded one year before the war ended, passed important liberal reforms during the first decade of his reign, after which time he became increasingly conservative. Just as he seemed to be entering another liberal phase, Alexander was assassinated in 1881. Among his reforms, the liberation (1861) of the serfs (see [Emancipation, Edict of](#)) was the most far-reaching, but significant changes were also made in local government, the judicial system, and education.

During the second half of the 19th cent., Russia continued its territorial expansion, and industrialization was accelerated. The remainder of the [Caucasus](#) was acquired and pacified; the territories of what is now the Central Asian Republics, including [Turkistan](#), were taken during 1864–65; and the southern section of the Far Eastern Territory (see [Russian Far East](#)) was acquired from China. Russia thus reached the frontiers of Afghanistan and China and the shores of the Pacific Ocean. [Vladivostok](#) was founded in 1860; in the early 20th cent. it became an important naval base. The [Trans-Siberian RR](#) (constructed 1891–1905) opened much of Siberia to colonization and exploitation.

[Alexander III](#) (reigned 1881–94), who succeeded Alexander II, pursued a reactionary domestic policy, guided by the influential [Poblyedonostzev](#). Alexander was followed by [Nicholas II](#) (reigned 1894–1917), the last Russian emperor, a generally incompetent ruler surrounded by a reactionary entourage. However, there was considerable financial and industrial development, directed largely by Count Witte. Russia, having suffered a severe diplomatic setback at the Congress of Berlin (see [Berlin, Congress of](#), 1878), eventually abandoned the [Three Emperors' League](#) with Germany and Austria-Hungary and in 1892 entered into an alliance with republican France. This alliance led to the Triple Entente (see [Triple Alliance and Triple Entente](#)) of England, France, and Russia.

War and Revolution

The disastrous and unpopular [Russo-Japanese War](#) (1904–5) led to the Revolution of 1905 (see [Russian Revolution](#)). Nicholas II was forced to grant a constitution, and a parliament (see [duma](#)) was established. Soon, however, the new democratic freedoms were curtailed, as the government again became reactionary. As a result, there was renewed agitation by revolutionaries; the emperor countered with police terror and attempted to channel popular discontent into anti-Semitic outbreaks (see [pogrom](#)). At the same time, Piotr [Stolypin](#) (prime minister during 1906–11) tried to create a class of independent landowning peasants by breaking up and redistributing the land held by village communities (see [mir](#)); however, he refused to split up the estates held by large landlords and generally ignored the peasant masses.

Although the Russian economy was mainly agricultural and underdeveloped, industry—largely financed by foreign capital—was growing rapidly in a few centers, notably St. Petersburg, Moscow, and the Baku (Baky; now in Azerbaijan) oil fields. It was particularly among the industrial workers, who because of their geographic concentration possessed great political strength, that the leftist Social Democratic party found its adherents. The formal split of the party into [Bolshevism and Menshevism](#) in 1912 had crucial consequences after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution of 1917. By promoting [Pan-Slavism](#) in the Balkan Peninsula and in Austria-Hungary, Russia played a leading role in the events that led to the outbreak (1914) of [World War I](#). Ill-prepared and cut off from its allies in the West, the country suffered serious reverses in the war at the hands of the Germans and Austrians.

Inflation, food shortages, and poor morale among the troops contributed to the outbreak of the February Revolution of 1917. Nicholas abdicated in Mar., 1917 (he was executed in July, 1918). A provisional government under Prince [Lvov](#), a moderate, tried to continue the war effort, but was opposed by the soviets (councils) of workers and soldiers. [Kerensky](#), who succeeded Lvov as prime minister in July, 1917, was also unable to enforce the authority of the central government. Finally, on Nov. 7, 1917 (Oct. 25 O.S.), the Bolsheviks, led by [Lenin](#), seized the government. Russia ended its involvement in

World War I by signing the humiliating Treaty of [Brest-Litovsk](#) (Mar., 1918), under which it lost much territory to the Central Powers.

Shortly after the signing of the treaty, and partly because of the reaction to its poor terms, civil war (complicated by foreign intervention) broke out in Russia. It continued until 1920, when the Soviet regime emerged victorious. (For a more detailed account of the intellectual and political background of the Russian Revolution and for the events of the revolution and the civil war, see [Russian Revolution](#).) Poland, Finland, and the Baltic countries emerged as independent states in the aftermath of the civil war; Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Transcaucasian countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia proclaimed their independence, but by 1921 were conquered by the Soviet armies. In 1917, Russia was officially proclaimed the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, which in 1922 was united with the Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Transcaucasian republics to form the see [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](#).

Post-Soviet Russia

After more than seven decades of Soviet rule, the regime of President [Gorbachev](#) marked the end of repressive political controls and permitted nationalist movements to arise in the constituent republics of the USSR. In 1990, Boris [Yeltsin](#) and other nationalists and reformers were elected to the Russian parliament; Yeltsin was subsequently chosen Russian president. Under Yeltsin, Russia declared its sovereignty (but not its independence) and began to challenge the central government's authority. In 1991, Yeltsin was reelected in the first popular election for president in the history of the Russian Republic.

Yeltsin and the leaders of eight other republics reached a power-sharing agreement with Gorbachev, but its imminent signing provoked a coup attempt (Aug., 1991) by Soviet hard-liners. In the aftermath, the USSR disintegrated. With Ukraine and Belarus, Russia established the [Commonwealth of Independent States](#). When Gorbachev resigned (Dec., 1991), Yeltsin had already taken control of most of the central government, and Russia assumed the USSR's UN seat.

Yeltsin moved rapidly to end or reduce state control of the economy, but control of parliament by former Communists led to conflicts and power struggles. On Sept. 21, 1993, Yeltsin suspended the parliament and called for new elections. Parliament retaliated by naming Vice President Aleksandr [Rutskoi](#) as acting president, and anti-Yeltsin forces barricaded themselves inside the parliament building. On Oct. 3, supporters of the anti-Yeltsin group broke through a security cordon to join the occupation, and also attacked other sites in the capital. The military interceded on Yeltsin's side, and on Oct. 4, after a bloody battle, troops recaptured the parliament building. Many people were jailed, and the parliament was dissolved.

In Dec., 1993, voters approved a new constitution that strengthened presidential power, establishing a mixed presidential-parliamentary system similar to that of France. In legislative elections at the same time, Yeltsin supporters fell short of a majority, as voters also supported ultranationalists, radical reformers, Communists, and others. The Russian government, under Prime Minister Viktor [Chernomyrdin](#), generally advocated moderate reform. The program made slow but discernible progress in stimulating growth and halting rampant inflation, but the economy continued to suffer from serious malfunctions, including a weak banking system and widespread corruption.

In Feb., 1994, parliament granted amnesty to persons implicated in the Aug., 1991, coup attempt and the Oct., 1993, rebellion. In the Dec., 1995, legislative elections the Communist party won the largest share of the vote (22%) and more than a third of the seats in the State Duma. The results were a new rebuff to Yeltsin and his government, and he subsequently replaced the more liberal ministers in the government with pragmatists and conservatives. Although his popularity had significantly diminished since he was first elected president, he ran again in June, 1996. He finished ahead of his chief rival, Communist Gennady [Zyuganov](#), in the first round and was reelected after a runoff in July. Ministerial replacements continued, and in Mar., 1998, Yeltsin dismissed his entire cabinet, hiring a new group of economic reformers and naming Sergei Kiriyenko as prime minister. By August he had dismissed many of his top aides and attempted to reinstate Chernomyrdin as prime minister. The nomination was rejected by parliament, however, and Yevgeny [Primakov](#), a compromise candidate agreeable to reformers and Communists, became the prime minister in September; two Communists became ministers in the government.

Primakov acted as a stabilizing influence, avoiding economic disaster in the wake of Russia's Aug., 1998, financial crisis, but his increasing popularity and his public support for the Communists in his government even as their party was mounting an impeachment of Yeltsin in the Duma led to his firing in May, 1999. Yeltsin appointed Sergei Stepashin as prime minister, and the impeachment failed to win the necessary votes. A sense of political crisis returned in August when Islamic militants from Chechnya invaded Dagestan (see below), and Yeltsin replaced Stepashin with Vladimir [Putin](#). After a series of terrorist bombings in Moscow and elsewhere that were blamed on Chechen militants, Putin launched an invasion of Chechnya. That action bolstered his popularity, as did a slight upturn in the economy due to rising prices for oil, Russia's most important export (industrial output continued to contract). Although with slightly less than a quarter of the vote the Communist party remained the single largest vote-getter in the Dec., 1999, parliamentary elections, center-right parties allied with Putin won nearly a third, and the vote was regarded as a mandate for Putin. On Dec. 31, Yeltsin resigned as president, and Putin became acting president.

One of Putin's first acts was to form an alliance with the Communists in the Duma; together his supporters (the Unity bloc) and the Communists held about 40% of the seats. In the elections of Mar., 2000, Putin bested ten other candidates to win election as Russia's president. Putin introduced several measures designed to increase central government control over the various Russian administrative units, including grouping them in seven large regional districts, ending the right of the units' executives to serve in the Federation Council, and suspending a number of laws that conflicted with federal law. He also won the authority to remove governors and dissolve legislatures that enact laws that conflict with the national constitution. Mikhail M. Kasyanov, a liberal, was appointed prime minister, and a broad plan for liberal economic reforms was enacted. The alliance with the Communists lasted until 2002, when Unity, which had earlier absorbed the populist Fatherland bloc, was strong enough to control the Duma alone.

Putin secured parliamentary ratification of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and the SALT II treaty (see [disarmament, nuclear](#)), and actively opposed modifying the ABM treaty so that the United States could build a larger missile defense system than the agreement permitted. Russia has proposed, however, a mobile, pan-European missile defense system that would function similarly, although it would not violate the ABM treaty. Significant reductions in the size of the armed forces also have been undertaken.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia has had to confront separatist movements in several ethnically based republics and other areas, including [Tatarstan](#) and, most notably, [Chechnya](#), which declared independence upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union in Dec., 1991. Russian troops were sent there in Dec., 1994; subsequent fighting resulted in heavy casualties, with the Chechen capital of Grozny reduced to rubble by Russian bombardment. A peace accord between Russia and Chechnya was signed in Moscow in May, 1996. The invasion of [Dagestan](#) by Islamic militants from Chechnya in 1999 and a series of terrorist bombings in Russia during Aug.-Sept., 1999, however, led to Russian air raids on Chechnya in Sept., 1999, and a subsequent full-scale ground invasion of the breakaway republic that again devastated its capital and resulted in ongoing guerrilla warfare. Chechen terrorists have also continued to mount attacks outside Chechnya, including the seizure of a crowded Moscow theater in Oct., 2002, and a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, in Sept, 2004.

In the mid- and late 1990s, Russia took steps toward closer relations with some of the former Soviet republics. Several agreements designed to bring about economic, military, and political integration with Belarus were signed, but progress toward that goal has been slow. Both nations also signed an agreement with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that called for establishing stronger ties. Tajikistan later joined the customs union the four established, and in 2000 the union became the Eurasian Economic Community. Years of negotiations with Ukraine over the disposition of the Black Sea fleet ended in an accord in 1997 that divided the ships between them and permitted Russia to base its fleet in Sevastopol for 20 years.

The agreement with Ukraine was seen in part as an attempt to forestall closer Ukrainian ties with NATO. Russia has objected to any NATO expansion that excludes Russia; in June, 1994, Russia reluctantly agreed to an association with NATO under the arrangement known as the Partnership for Peace. Although several former Eastern European satellites joined NATO in 1999, any expansion that included nations once part of the Soviet Union would be highly sensitive. In the civil war and subsequent clashes in the former Yugoslavia, Russia was sympathetic toward the Serbs, a traditional ally, and there was considerable Russian opposition to such policies as NATO's bombing of Serb positions, especially in 1999.

Under Putin, Russia also has revived its ties with many former Soviet client states, and used its economic leverage to reassert its sway over the more independent-minded former Soviet republics, particularly Georgia. The country has nonetheless continued to maintain warmer ties with the West than the old Soviet Union did. Putin was an earlier supporter of the U.S. "war on terrorism", and in 2001 Russia began to explore establishing closer ties with NATO, which culminated in the establishment (2002) of a NATO-Russia Council through which Russia could participate in NATO discussions on many nondefense issues. Russia even returned to Afghanistan, providing aid in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Taliban. Russia did, however, resist the idea of resorting to military intervention in Iraq in order to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, and as the United States pressed in 2003 for a Security Council resolution supporting the use of force, Russia joined France in vowing to veto such a resolution. By the end of 2003, Russia had experienced five years of steady economic growth, and recovered (and even seen benefits) from the collapse of the ruble in 1998.

In 2003 tensions flared with Ukraine over the [Kerch Strait](#), sparked by Russia's building of a sea dike there, but the conflict was peacefully resolved. In Sept., 2003, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine signed an agreement to create a common economic space. Internally, there was a conflict between the government and the extremely rich tycoons known as the oligarchs over the extent of the role business executives would be allowed to play in politics. Mikhail Khodorkovsky, chairman of the Russian oil giant Yukos, was arrested in October on charges of fraud and tax evasion, but his political aspirations and the government's desire to regain control over valuable resources were believed to have had as much to do with the government's move against him as any crime. In Dec., 2004, Yukos assets were sold to a little-known, newly established company that was soon acquired by a state-run oil company. Khodorkovsky was convicted in May, 2005, in a verdict that took the judges 12 days to read. Meanwhile, the Dec., 2003, elections resulted in a major victory for the United Russia bloc and its allies. The loose group of Putin supporters ultimately secured two thirds of the seats, but outside observers criticized the election campaign for being strongly biased toward pro-government candidates and parties.

Prior to the Mar., 2004 presidential elections Putin dismissed Prime Minister Kasyanov and his government; the prime minister had been critical of Yukos investigation. Mikhail Y. Fradkov, who had served largely in a number of economic and trade positions, was named to replace Kasyanov. Putin was reelected by a landslide in Mar., 2004, but observers again criticized the campaign as biased. A series of deadly, Chechnya-related terror attacks during the summer culminated in the seizure of a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, which ended with the deaths more of more than 300 people, many of them children. Putin responded by calling for, among other changes, an end to the election of Duma representatives from districts and the appointment (instead of election) of the executives of oblasts and similar divisions of Russia. These moves, which were subsequently enacted, further centralized power in the Russian Federation and diminished its federal aspects. The federal government also sought to reduce the number of oblasts and regions by encouraging the merger of smaller units into larger ones.

In Oct., 2004, Russia and China, whose relations had continued to improve, signed a number of agreements and finally resolved all disputes concerning their common border. Russia's reputation suffered internationally, however, in late 2004 when it threw its support behind government candidates in Ukraine and the Georgian region of Abkhazia; in both elections, the candidates Moscow opposed ultimately succeeded despite strong resistance on the part of the existing governments to change. Russia subsequently (Mar., 2005) moved quickly to side with opponents of Kyrgyzstan president Akayev when he was forced from office. Large-scale violence re-erupted in the Caucasus in Oct., 2005, when militants with ties to the Chechen rebels mounted coordinated attacks in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria.

In late 2005 Russia found itself accused of using its state-controlled gas monopoly, Gazprom, as a punitive instrument of foreign policy when the company insisted that Ukraine pay market rates for natural gas, despite having been given a favorable long-term contract when Russia had unsuccessfully tried to influence the Ukrainian presidential race. When negotiations failed, Gazprom cut off supplies to Ukraine in Jan., 2006, a move that also affected supplies in transit to other European nations, provoking European concerns about the reliability of Russian gas deliveries. (The subsequent reduction in deliveries to Europe during a extreme cold snap in Russia in Jan., 2006, only reinforced concerns about reliability.) Although the dispute was soon resolved by a compromise, the affair hurt Russia's and Gazprom's image, and led to tensions with with the nations of the European Union.

The question of Russia's manipulation of its energy shipments for political purposes became an issue again in late 2006 when Gazprom announced it would double the rate it charged Georgia (to roughly market rates); the move followed several retaliatory actions taken against Georgia by the Russian government (see below). Gazprom also increased its charges for natural gas to several other formerly Soviet-ruled nations. One such nation, Belarus, usually a strong Russian ally, responded to an increase in the Russian duty on oil exported to it by imposing a transit tax on Russian oil exported through pipelines in Belarus. The move provoked a spat that led Russia to cut off oil for several days before Belarus revoked the tax; the cutoff again raised questions in the EU about Russia's reliability as an energy supplier.

Tensions with Moldova (over the [Trans-Dniester region](#)) and with Georgia increased in early 2006, and Russia banned the imports of wine and brandy from both nations, supposedly for health reasons. The arrest by Georgia in Sept., 2006, of several Russians on charges of spying provoked a strong retaliatory response from Russia, including the breaking of all transport and postal links; the links were not restored until 2008. Within Georgia, however, the Russian actions seemed to solidify support for the Georgian government. Asserted health issues have been used by Russia to ban food imports from other nations, such as Poland, with which Russia has had conflicts, and other forms of economic retaliation were used against Estonia in 2007 after a Soviet war memorial was relocated from downtown Tallinn. New membership requirements for political parties, introduced in 2007, have forced the dissolution of a number of opposition parties.

American plans, revealed in 2007, to include components of its missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic provoked a strong response from Russia. President Putin said in June that such a move would force Russia to target Europe with its weapons; the president also announced that he was suspending Russia's participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (the suspension took effect in Dec., 2007). In Sept., 2007, Putin replaced Prime Minister Fradkov with Viktor Zubkov, the head of Russia's financial monitoring service and an associate of Putin's since the early 1990s.

United Russia, running in Dec., 2007, with Putin's explicit support, again dominated the parliamentary elections; once again, foreign observers noted the progovernment bias of the campaigning, and there were some complaints of vote fraud. The same month Putin announced his support for Dmitri [Medvedev](#), a first deputy prime minister, to succeed him as president in 2008. In the Mar., 2008, vote Medvedev was easily elected to the post, but the presidential election also was marred by progovernment bias and other irregularities. Meanwhile, in February, Russia's Gazprom threatened to cut Ukraine's gas supply over unpaid debts; although the cut was averted, the issue reemerged in March, when supplies were reduced for several days. Russia's strong objections to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia contributed to NATO's decision to offer those nations eventual membership but not begin the process that would ultimately lead to their admission.

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Definition

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Country name originally designating the prerevolutionary Russian Empire (until 1917), now used to refer informally to the Russian Federation.

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