CHAPTER 9

POLITICS IN RUSSIA

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Country Bio

RUSSIA

Population
142.2 million

Territory
6,593,000 square miles

Year of Independence
1991

Year of Current Constitution
1993

Head of State
President Dmitrii Anatol'evich Medvedev

Head of Government
Premier Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

Languages
Russian, other languages of ethnic nationalities

Religion
Russian Orthodox 70–80%, other Christian 1–2%, Muslim 14–15%, Buddhist 0.6%, Jewish 0.3%, other or nonreligious 5–15%

ENSURING CONTINUITY OF POWER

On May 7, 2008, **Dmitrii Anatol'evich Medvedev** took the oath of office as president of the Russian Federation. The solemn ceremony—attended by his predecessor, Vladimir Putin, and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch of Russia, Alexii II—signaled that the leadership was united around the choice of the new president. In Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and other states in the former Soviet Union, the succession from one president to another has sometimes triggered a struggle for power among contending political forces, leading to popular uprisings with unpredictable outcomes.[1] The Russian authorities were determined not to allow a similar disruption in the transfer of power from one president to the next.

The succession was smooth, but hardly democratic. Although a presidential election had been held on March 2, every detail was closely controlled so that no serious challenge to Medvedev could arise. Once Putin had chosen Medvedev to succeed him, the Kremlin took no chances on the outcome. The state-controlled mass media, regional governors, big business, and the election commission all fell in line. The manipulated election process demonstrated to the world and to any would-be opponents that Medvedev was backed by a united front of all the authorities.

Adding to the display of continuity was the fact that Vladimir Putin himself stayed on in power as prime minister. Medvedev's first act as newly inaugurated president was to name Putin as head of government. This neat arrangement—Putin made Medvedev his successor, Medvedev kept Putin in power—solved several problems. Putin's exceptional popularity among the public and the authorities' fear of a destabilizing split among the ruling elite made it desirable to find a postpresidency role for Putin that would ensure continuity in policy and instant acceptance of the new president by the political elite. At the same time, the authorities deemed it important to observe the niceties of constitutional law, which require that a president serve no more than two consecutive terms. Putin's move therefore allowed the leadership to comply with the constitution while retaining a final say over policy.

The new "tandem" leadership arrangement created some uncertainty in elite circles about who was really in charge (see Box 9.1). With time, Medvedev has expanded the sphere of his influence by announcing major new policy initiatives and replacing senior government officials, but he has not altered any of the basic policies or institutional arrangements established when Putin was president. Most Russians believe that Medvedev is basically continuing Putin's policies.[2] However, as the next presidential election—scheduled for 2012—draws closer, it is possible that competition between Medvedev and Putin will grow, particularly if Medvedev chooses to run again for president.

The peculiarity of the situation arises from the gap between the formal constitutional rules and the informal understandings that guide the exercise of power. Russia's constitution provides both for a directly elected president, who is head of state, and a prime minister, who heads the government. The prime minister is chosen by the president but must enjoy the confidence of parliament. But Russia has never had successful experience with the sharing of power between two leaders. As former Russian president Boris Yeltsin once put it, "In Russia, only one person can be number one." For most of the period since Russia's present-day constitution has been in force, the president has been the clearly dominant political figure, while the prime minister has mainly been responsible for managing the economy and carrying out the president's commands. However, Putin accumulated a great deal of power during his tenure as president, using such classic power-consolidation tactics as rewarding supporters with lucrative posts in ministries and state corporations. He maintained impressively high public support, in large part thanks to the economy's robust performance

The Putin-Medvedev Tandem

BOX 9.1

The tandem leadership of Vladimir Putin as prime minister and Dmitrii Medvedev as president invites constant speculation about their relationship. Is Putin still running Russia, with Medvedev a mere decorative appendage? A power struggle between them could have destabilizing consequences for the country as the political elites divide into opposing factions.

Putin is Medvedev's senior by thirteen years. Their association began in 1990, when Putin started work in the mayor's office in St. Petersburg and made Medvedev his legal advisor. In 1996, Putin moved to Moscow to take a job in Yeltsin's presidential administration. Here his career took off. In July 1998, Yeltsin named Putin head of the FSB, and in March 1999, secretary of the Security Council as well. In August 1999, President Yeltsin appointed him prime minister. Thanks in part to his decisive handling of the federal military operation in Chechnia, Putin's popularity ratings rose quickly. On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin resigned, automatically making Putin acting president. Putin went on to run for the presidency and, on March 26, 2000, he won with an outright majority of the votes in the first round. He was reelected president in March 2004 by a wide margin.

In 1999, Putin brought Medvedev to Moscow. Medvedev ran Putin's successful presidential election campaign, and after Putin was inaugurated as president, Putin made Medvedev deputy chief of staff in the presidential administration. In 2003, Putin appointed him head of the presidential administration. In 2005, probably with a view to grooming him as a possible successor, Putin named Medvedev first deputy prime minister. In late 2007, Putin declared that Medvedev was his choice for president but that he intended to stay on in some position of responsibility. Immediately upon being inaugurated as president, Medvedev named Putin his prime minister.

Putin and Medvedev project different public personas. Putin cultivates an image of a tough, decisive, down-to-earth leader. Although uncomfortable with the give-and-take of public politics, he is skillful at explaining complex issues in clear and plain language. Medvedev, in contrast, projects a cultivated, scholarly demeanor. His public statements are much more unequivocal than Putin about the need for democratic and market-oriented reform.

So far, the two have maintained a remarkably harmonious relationship as president and prime minister based on their twenty years of association. As President Medvedev noted in an interview with a French newspaper, he and Putin have an effective "working alliance."

until 2008. He retained his power and popularity when he moved to head the government and continued to dominate the decision-making process in most spheres of policy, regardless of the formal lines of authority. Still, as president, Dmitrii Medvedev has considerable institutional prerogatives and has sought to use them to consolidate his own base of power. As a result, under the "tandem" arrangement of Medvedev and Putin, it is often unclear which of them has the predominant power to set policy in any given issue area. So far, the arrangement has worked harmoniously, but the breakout of an open rivalry between the two would split the political elite and destabilize the regime.

CURRENT POLICY CHALLENGES

Within months of Medvedev's inauguration, Russia's economy succumbed to the severe worldwide financial crash that began in summer 2008. Up to that point, Russia had enjoyed a decade of steady economic growth. As a major world exporter of oil and gas and other natural resources, Russia benefited from the sharp rise in world energy and commodity prices in the 2000s: real incomes tripled from 2000 to 2008. The decade of recovery followed a harsh decade of economic contraction and social dislocation resulting from the painful transition from the socialist economic system to a market-oriented capitalist system. Russia benefited from opening its economy up to the world as capital investment entered the country and raw-materials exports created immense incomes. But globalization had a steep downside when the worldwide financial crash struck in 2008. Capital fled the country (the stock market lost two-thirds of its value in less than one year), and its highly indebted firms struggled to meet their obligations. As world oil and gas prices tumbled to one-third of their peak level, Russian budget revenues plummeted and the federal budget fell into a deep deficit. Consumer demand dropped, hurting Russia's manufacturers. Russia's economy contracted more than that of any other major power; its GDP fell almost 8 percent in 2009 alone and began to recover slowly only in 2010. Financial reserves that the government had set aside during the boom years of the 2000s spared the country many of the worst effects of the recession. The government was able to pump hundreds of billions of rubles into failing banks, industrial enterprises, unemployment benefits, and pensions. As a result, many Russians were shielded from poverty, and the country was spared the massive financial instability that broke out in other heavily indebted states that lacked Russia's deep reserves.

President Medvedev has attempted to spell out the implications of the crisis for Russia. He has repeatedly pointed out that Russia must overcome its reliance on exports of natural resources to maintain its growth, and instead must modernize and diversify its economy. But neither Medvedev nor other Russian leaders have effective policy instruments for bringing about such a huge change in the country's basic economic structure. This reflects a recurring dilemma in Russian history: Major reform requires an enormous and sustained exercise of power by the country's political leaders to overcome the resistance of administrative and social groups to change. To accomplish their ends, modernizing rulers have traditionally centralized power, thereby weakening the incentives for initiative outside the state that could drive sustained growth and initiative in society.

Both Putin and Medvedev have spoken frankly about the dangers of the "resource curse" for Russia. That is the idea that in countries relying on windfall revenues from natural resources, the leaders avoid investing in the skills and knowledge of the population, as a result of which the societies wind up with lower levels of economic and political development than in resource-poor countries. In September 2009, President Medvedev denounced Russia's current economic structure as "primitive" for its dependence on natural-resource production, its "chronic corruption, the outdated habit of relying on the state to solve our problems, on foreign countries, on some sort of 'all-powerful doctrine,' on anything and everything except on ourselves." He noted that "the energy efficiency and labor productivity of most of our enterprises are shamefully low" and added that the real tragedy was that most owners, managers, and state officials do not appear to be particularly worried about the situation.[3]

Medvedev and Putin have also frankly acknowledged the grim demographic facts: Russia's population has been shrinking as a result of the excess of deaths over births, and the economy is increasingly dependent on migrant labor from China, Central Asia, and elsewhere. Inequality across regions and social groups is rising. A recent National Human Development Report written by a team of Russian experts noted that some regions of Russia live at a level of human development comparable to that of Central Europe, while others are closer to an African level.[4]

But while Russian leaders have admitted the gravity of the problems the country faces, they have been unable to break through the obstacles standing in the way of solving them. Three in particular have proven to be stumbling blocks: the resistance by state officials to any reforms that weaken their power; the vast physical size of the country, which impedes efforts to forge coalitions in society around broad common interests in support of significant reform; and the legacy of the Soviet development model, which concentrated resources in giant state-owned enterprises—often located in remote, harsh regions—that are nearly impossible to convert into competitive capitalist firms viable in a global marketplace. Taken together, these factors stack the deck against modernizing and democratizing reforms.

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

The Tsarist Regime

The Russian state traces its origins to the princely state that arose around Kiev (today the capital of independent Ukraine) in the ninth century. For nearly a thousand years, the Russian state was autocratic, ruled by a hereditary monarch whose power was unlimited by any constitutional constraints. Only in the first decade of the twentieth century did the Russian tsar agree to grant a constitution calling for an elected legislature—and even then, the tsar soon dissolved the legislature and arbitrarily revised the constitution.

In addition to autocracy, the historical legacy of Russian statehood includes lasting strains of absolutism, patrimonialism, and Orthodox Christianity. *Absolutism* means that the tsar aspired to wield absolute power over the subjects of the realm. *Patrimonialism* refers to the idea that the ruler treated his realm as property that he owned, rather than as a society with its own legitimate rights and interests.[5] This concept of power continues to influence state rulers today. Finally, the tsarist state identified itself with the *Russian Orthodox Church*. In Russia, the Orthodox Church ties itself closely to the state, considering itself a national church. Traditionally, it has exhorted its adherents to show loyalty and obedience to the state in worldly matters, in return for which it enjoyed a monopoly of spiritual power as Russia's state church. This legacy is still manifest in the present-day rulers' efforts to associate themselves with the heritage of the church and in many Russians' impulse to identify their state with a higher spiritual mission.

Absolutism, patrimonialism, and orthodoxy have been recurring elements of Russian political culture. But alternative motifs have been influential as well. At some points in Russian history, the country's rulers have sought to modernize its economy and society. Russia imported Western practices in technology, law, state organization, and education in order to make the state competitive with other great powers. Modernizing rulers had a powerful impact on Russian society, bringing it closer to West European models. The imperative of building Russia's military and economic potential was all the more pressing because of Russia's constant expansion through conquest and annexation of neighboring territories and its ever-present need to defend its borders. The state's role in controlling and mobilizing society rose with the need to govern a vast territory. By the end of the seventeenth century, Russia was territorially the largest state in the world. But for most of its history, Russia's imperial reach exceeded its actual grasp.

Compared with other major powers of Europe, Russia's economic institutions remained backward well into the twentieth century. However, the trajectory of its development, especially in the nineteenth century, was toward that of a modern industrial society. By the time the tsarist order fell in 1917, Russia had a large industrial sector, although it was concentrated in a few cities. The middle class was greatly outnumbered by the vast and impoverished peasantry and the radicalized industrial working class. As a result, the social basis for a peaceful democratic transition was too weak to prevent the Communists from seizing power in 1917.

The thousand-year tsarist era left a contradictory legacy. The tsars attempted to legitimate their absolute power by appealing to tradition, empire, and divine right. They treated law as an instrument of rule, rather than a source of authority. The doctrines that rulers should be accountable to the ruled and that sovereignty resides in the will of the people were alien to Russian state tradition. Throughout Russian history, state and society have been more distant from each other than in Western societies. Rulers and populace regarded one another with mistrust. This gap has been overcome at times of great national trials, such as World War II. Russia celebrated victory in that war

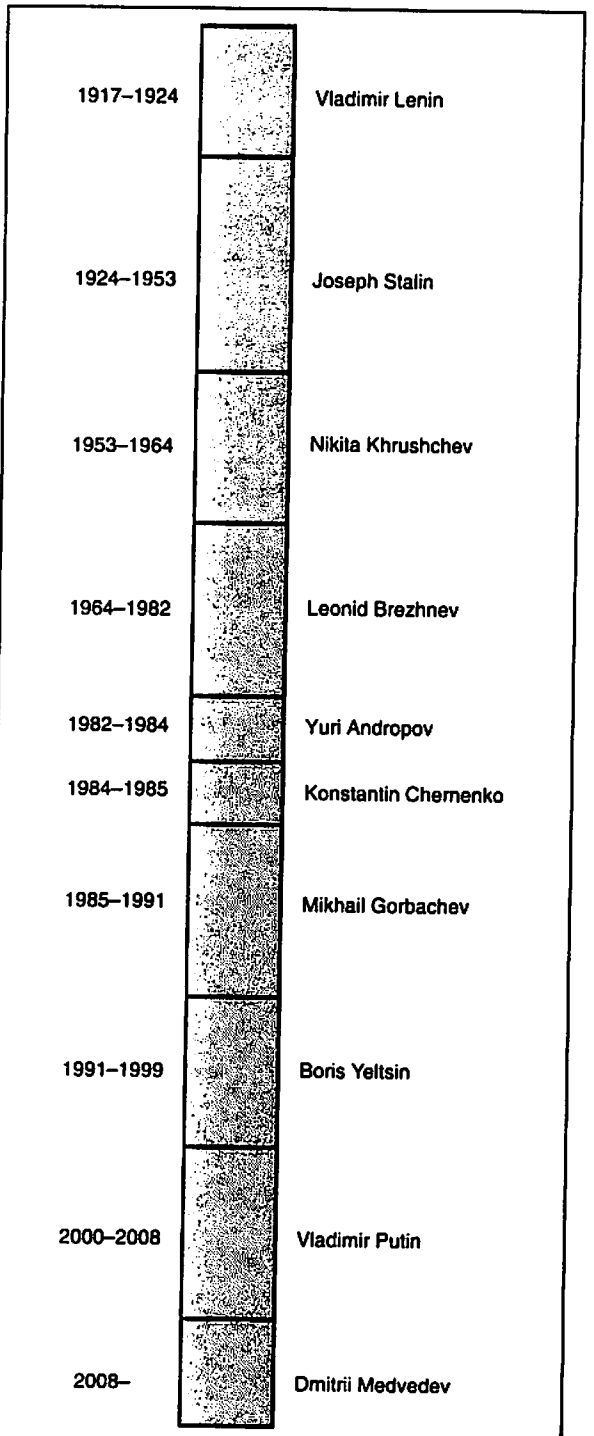
as a triumphant demonstration of the unity of state and people. But Russia's political traditions also include a yearning for equality, solidarity, and community, as well as for moral purity and sympathy for the downtrodden. And throughout the Russian heritage runs a deep strain of pride in the greatness of the country and the endurance of its people.

The Communist Revolution and the Soviet Order

The tsarist regime proved unable to meet the overwhelming demands of national mobilization in World War I. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in February 1917 (March 1917, by the Western calendar). He was replaced by a short-lived provisional government, which, in turn, fell when the Russian Communists—Bolsheviks, as they called themselves—took power in October 1917 (November, by the Western calendar). Their aim was to create a socialist society in Russia and, eventually, to spread revolutionary socialism throughout the world. Socialism, the Russian Communist Party believed, meant a society without private ownership of the means of production, one where the state owned and controlled all important economic assets and where political power was exercised in the name of the working people. **Vladimir Ilyich Lenin** was the leader of the Russian Communist Party and the first head of the Soviet Russian government. (Figure 9.1 lists the Soviet and post-Soviet leaders since 1917.)

Under Lenin's system of rule, the Communist Party controlled all levels of government. At each level of the territorial hierarchy of the country, full-time Communist Party officials supervised government. At the top, final power to decide policy rested in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Politburo. Under **Joseph Stalin**, who took power after Lenin's death in 1924, power was even further centralized. Stalin instituted a totalitarian regime intent on building up Russia's industrial and military might. The state survived the terrible test of World War II, but the combined cost of war and terror under Stalin was staggering: The war is estimated to have cost the country some 26 million lives, and terror, as the secret police sent many millions of people to labor camps on suspicion of opposing the regime, millions more.

The institutions of rule that Stalin left behind when he died in 1953 eventually crippled the Soviet



Timeline of Russian Rulers since 1917

Gorbachev was the last Soviet leader; Yeltsin was the first leader of post-Soviet Russia.

FIGURE 9.1

state. They included personalistic rule, insecurity for rulers and ruled alike, heavy reliance on the secret police, and a militarized economy. None of Stalin's successors could reform the system without undermining Communist rule itself. Stalin's immediate successor, Nikita Khrushchev, loosened some of the harsh controls and reduced the level of political repression, but was unable to accomplish fundamental reform. His successor, Leonid Brezhnev, abandoned the impulse for reform and instead concentrated on consolidating power. As a result, the political system and economy stagnated, and the fundamental weaknesses of the system mounted.

The problem of the late Soviet system was that, as vast as the state's powers were, their use was frustrated by bureaucratic immobilism. Overcentralization undermined the leaders' actual power to enact significant policy change—or even to recognize when serious policy change was needed. The center's ability to coordinate bureaucratic agencies in order to execute its initiatives was frequently undermined by tacit resistance to the center's orders by officials at lower levels. Bureaucratic officials were generally more devoted to protecting and advancing their own personal and career interests than to serving the public interest. The political system of the Soviet Union grew top-heavy, unresponsive, and corrupt. The regime had more than enough power to crush any political opposition. However, it was unable to modernize the economy or improve living standards for the population. By the early 1980s, the economy had stopped growing, and the country was unable to compete militarily or economically with the West.

After the deaths of three elderly leaders—Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko—in quick succession in 1982, 1984, and 1985, the ruling party Politburo turned to a vigorous reformer named **Mikhail Gorbachev** to lead the country. Gorbachev quickly grasped the levers of power that the system granted the general secretary. He moved both to strengthen his own political base and to carry out a program of reform.[6] Emphasizing the need for greater openness—**glasnost'**—in society, Gorbachev stressed that the ultimate test of the party's effectiveness lay in improving the economic well-being of the country and its people. Gorbachev not only called for political democratization, he also legalized private enterprise for individual and cooperative businesses and encouraged them to fill the many gaps in the economy left by the inefficiency of the state sector. He declared that the entire economic system needed to be overhauled, a program he called **perestroika**, or restructuring. *Perestroika* referred to introducing elements of market competition and management flexibility while preserving state ownership in most sectors of the economy. Gorbachev made major concessions to the United States in the sphere of arms control, which resulted in a treaty that, for the first time in history, called for the destruction of entire classes of nuclear missiles.

Frustrated by the lack of success of his economic reforms, Gorbachev turned to democratization in order to mobilize popular pressure for reform. In 1989 and 1990, Gorbachev's plan for competitive elections and a working parliament was realized as elections were held and new deputies were elected at the center and in every region and locality. He welcomed the explosion of new, unlicensed associations that sprang up, and when nearly half a million coal miners went on strike in the summer of 1989, Gorbachev declared himself sympathetic to their demands.

Gorbachev's radicalism received its most dramatic confirmation through the astonishing developments of 1989 in Eastern Europe. All the regimes making up the Communist Bloc collapsed and gave way to multiparty parliamentary regimes in virtually bloodless popular revolutions. The Soviet Union stood by and supported the revolutions. The overnight dismantling of communism in Eastern Europe meant that the elaborate structure of party ties, police cooperation, economic trade, and military alliance that had developed with Eastern Europe after World War II vanished. Divided Germany was allowed to reunite.

In the Soviet Union itself, the Communist Party faced a critical loss of authority. The newly elected governments of the national republics making up the Soviet state one by one declared that they were sovereign. The three Baltic republics declared their intention to secede from the union. Between 1989 and 1990, throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Communist Party rule crumbled.

Political Institutions of the Transition Period: Demise of the Soviet Union

Gorbachev's reforms had consequences he did not intend. The 1990 elections of deputies to the supreme soviets in all fifteen republics and to local soviets stimulated popular nationalist and democratic movements in most republics. In the core republic of Russia itself, Gorbachev's rival, Boris Yeltsin, was elected chairman

of the Russian Supreme Soviet in June 1990. As chief of state in the Russian Republic, Yeltsin was well-positioned to challenge Gorbachev for preeminence.

Yeltsin's rise forced Gorbachev to alter his strategy. Beginning in March 1991, Gorbachev sought terms for a new federal or confederal union that would be acceptable to Yeltsin and the Russian leadership, as well as to the leaders of the other republics. In April 1991, he reached an agreement on the outlines of a new treaty of union with nine of the fifteen republics, including Russia. A weak central government would manage basic coordinating functions. But the republics would gain the power to control the economies of their territories.

Gorbachev had underestimated the strength of his opposition. On August 19, 1991, a conspiracy of senior officials placed Gorbachev under house arrest and seized power. In response, thousands of citizens in Moscow and St. Petersburg rallied to protest the coup attempt. Yeltsin, who avoided being arrested by the coup leaders, led the protests in Moscow. The coup collapsed on the third day, but Gorbachev's power had been fatally weakened. Neither the union nor the Russian power structures heeded his commands. Through the fall of 1991, the Russian government took over the union government, ministry by ministry. In December, Yeltsin and the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus formally declared the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved. On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president and turned the powers of his office over to Boris Yeltsin. On New Year's Day, 1992, the Soviet flag was hauled down over the Kremlin, and the white, blue, and red flag of independent Russia was raised in its place.

Political Institutions of the Transition Period: Russia 1990–1993

Boris Yeltsin was elected president of the Russian Federation in June 1991. Unlike Gorbachev, Yeltsin was elected in a direct, competitive election, which gave him a considerable advantage in mobilizing public support against Gorbachev and the central Soviet Union government (see Box 9.2).

Boris Yeltsin, Russia's First President

BOX 9.2

Boris Yeltsin, born in 1931, graduated from the Urals Polytechnical Institute in 1955 with a diploma in civil engineering and worked for a long time in construction. From 1976 to 1985, he served as first secretary of the Sverdlovsk *oblast* (provincial) Communist Party organization.

Early in 1986, Yeltsin became first secretary of the Moscow city party organization, but he was removed in November 1987 for speaking out against Mikhail Gorbachev. Positioning himself as a victim of the party establishment, Yeltsin made a remarkable political comeback. In the 1989 elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, he won a Moscow at-large seat with almost 90 percent of the vote. The following year, he was elected to the Russian republic's parliament with over 80 percent of the vote. He was then elected its chairman in June 1990. In 1991, he was elected president of Russia. Thus, he had won three major races in three successive years. He was reelected president in 1996 in a dramatic, come-from-behind race against the leader of the Communist Party.

Yeltsin's last years in office were notable for his lengthy spells of illness and for the carousel of prime ministerial appointments. The entourage of family members and advisors around him seemed to exercise undue influence over him. Yet, infirm as he was, he judged that Russia's interests and his own would be safe in Vladimir Putin's hands. Yeltsin's resignation speech was full of contrition for his failure to bring a better life to Russians. After retiring, Yeltsin stayed out of the public eye. He died of heart failure on April 23, 2007, and was buried in Moscow with full honors.

Yeltsin's legacy is mixed. He was most effective when engaged in political battle, whether he was fighting for supremacy against Gorbachev or fighting against the Communists. Impulsive and undisciplined, he was gifted with exceptionally keen political intuition. He regarded economic reform as an instrument in his political war with the Communist opposition and used privatization to make it impossible for any future rulers to return to state socialism. Imperious and willful, he also regarded the adoption of the 1993 constitution as a major achievement and willingly accepted the limits on his presidential power that it imposed.

Like Gorbachev before him, Yeltsin demanded extraordinary powers from parliament to cope with the country's economic problems. Following the August 1991 coup attempt, parliament granted him emergency decree powers to cope with the economic crisis. Yeltsin formed a government led by a group of young, Western-oriented reformers determined to carry out a decisive economic transformation. The new government's economic program took effect on January 2, 1992. Their first results were felt immediately as prices skyrocketed. Quickly, many politicians began to distance themselves from the program; even Yeltsin's vice president denounced the program as "economic genocide." Through 1992, opposition to the reforms grew stronger and more intransigent. Increasingly, the political confrontation between Yeltsin and the reformers on the one side and the opposition to radical economic reform on the other became centered in the two branches of government. President Yeltsin demanded broad powers to carry out the reforms, but parliament refused to go along. In March 1993, an opposition motion to remove the president through impeachment nearly passed in the parliament.

On September 21, 1993, Yeltsin decreed the parliament dissolved and called for elections for a new parliament. Yeltsin's enemies barricaded themselves inside the parliament building. After a ten-day standoff, the dissidents joined with some loosely organized paramilitary units outside the building and attacked the Moscow mayor's offices. They even called on their followers to "seize the Kremlin." Finally, the army agreed to back Yeltsin and suppress the uprising by force, shelling the parliament building in the process.

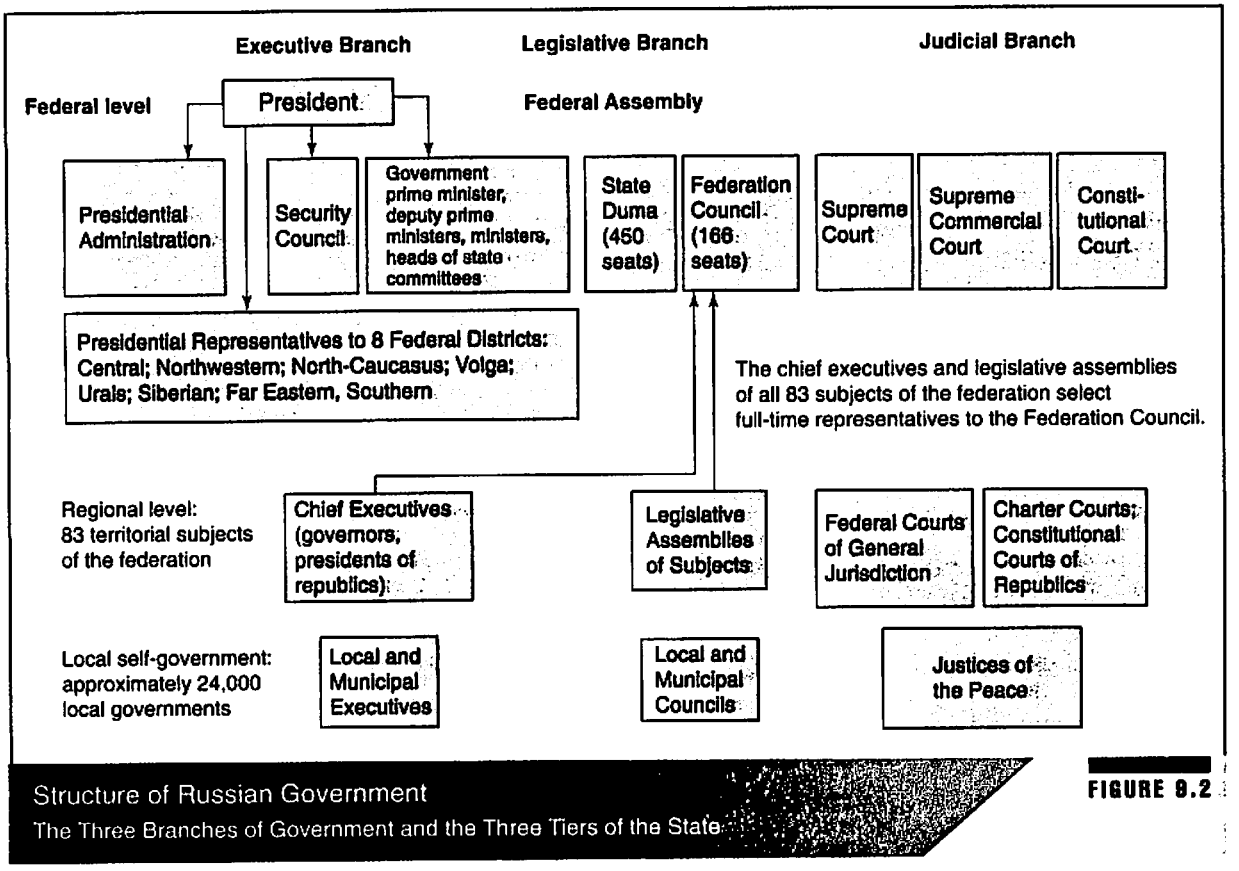
The violence of October 1993 cast a long shadow over subsequent events. Yeltsin's decree meant that national elections were to be held for a legislature that did not constitutionally exist, since the new constitution establishing these institutions was to be voted on in a referendum held in parallel with the parliamentary elections. The Duma election and referendum were held in December 1993, and the constitution was approved. For all the turmoil surrounding its adoption, the formal institutions established under the constitution adopted in December 1993 have remained in place ever since.[7]

THE CONTEMPORARY CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

The Presidency

Yeltsin's constitution combined elements of presidentialism and parliamentarism. (See Figure 9.2 for a schematic overview of the Russian constitutional structure.) Although it provided for the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and for a federal division of power between the central and regional levels of government, it made the president by far the strongest institution in the state. The president is directly elected for a six-year term and may not serve more than two consecutive terms. The president names the prime minister to head the government. The government must have the confidence of parliament to remain in power. Although the constitution does not call the president the head of the executive branch, he is so in fact by virtue of his power to appoint the prime minister and the rest of the government and his right to issue **presidential decrees** with the force of law. (The decree power is somewhat limited in that decrees may not violate existing law and can be superseded by legislation.)

Over the years since the constitution was approved, some informal practices have come to govern the exercise of central power. For example, the president and government divide executive responsibility. The government, headed by the prime minister, is primarily responsible for economic and social policy. The president directly oversees the ministries and other bodies directly concerned with coercion, law enforcement, and state security—the "power ministries." These include the Foreign Ministry, Defense Ministry, Ministry of Internal Affairs (which controls the regular police and security troops), Federal Security Service (FSB—formerly the KGB), and several other security and intelligence agencies. The president and his staff set overall policy in the foreign and domestic domains, and the government develops the specific proposals and rules carrying out this policy. In practice, the government answers to the president, not parliament. The government's base of support is the president, rather than a particular coalition of parties in parliament. This arrangement has continued under the duo of President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin.



Structure of Russian Government

The Three Branches of Government and the Three Tiers of the State

FIGURE 8.2

Despite the pronounced presidential tilt to the system, the parliament does have some potential for independent action. Its ability to exercise its rights, however, depends on the composition of political forces represented in parliament and the cohesiveness of the majority. Parliament's approval is required for any bill to become law. The State Duma (the lower house of parliament) must confirm the president's nominee for prime minister. If, after three successive votes, the Duma refuses to confirm the nomination, the president must dissolve the Duma and call new elections. Likewise, the Duma may vote to deny confidence in the government. If a motion of no confidence carries twice, the president must either dissolve parliament or dismiss the government. During Yeltsin's tenure as president, the Duma was able to block some of Yeltsin's legislative initiatives. Since 2003, however, it has largely been a rubber stamp. The constitution allows for a variety of types of relationships among the president, government, and parliament, depending on the degree to which the president dominates the political system.

In addition to these powers, the president has a number of other formal and informal powers in his constitutional capacity as "head of state," "guarantor of the constitution," and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He oversees a large presidential administration, which supervises the federal government and keeps tabs on regional governments. Informally, the administration also manages relations with the parliament, the courts, big business, the media, political parties, and major interest groups.

The president also oversees many official and quasi-official supervisory and advisory commissions, which he creates and directs using his decree power. One is the **Security Council**, chaired by the president. Besides the president, the Security Council consists of a permanent secretary, the heads of the power ministries and other security-related agencies, the prime minister, and the chairs of the two chambers of

parliament. Its powers are broad but shadowy. Putin used it to formulate policy proposals not only in matters of foreign and defense policy, but also on selected issues having to do with the organization of the executive branch.

Another prominent advisory body is the **State Council**, which comprises the heads of the regional governments and thus parallels the Federation Council. Still another is the **Public Chamber**, which is made up of 126 members from selected civic, professional, artistic, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Its purpose is to deliberate on matters of public policy, make recommendations to parliament and the government on pending policy issues, and link civil society with the state. Like the State Council, it is a quasi-parliamentary deliberative body that the president can consult at will. All three bodies duplicate some of the deliberative and representative functions of parliament—and therefore weaken parliament's role. They illustrate the tendency, under both Yeltsin and Putin, for the president to create and dissolve new structures answering directly to the president. These improvised structures can be politically useful for the president as counterweights to constitutionally mandated bodies (such as parliament), as well as providing policy advice and feedback. They help ensure that the president is always the dominant institution in the political system, but they undermine the authority of other constitutional structures such as parliament.

The Government

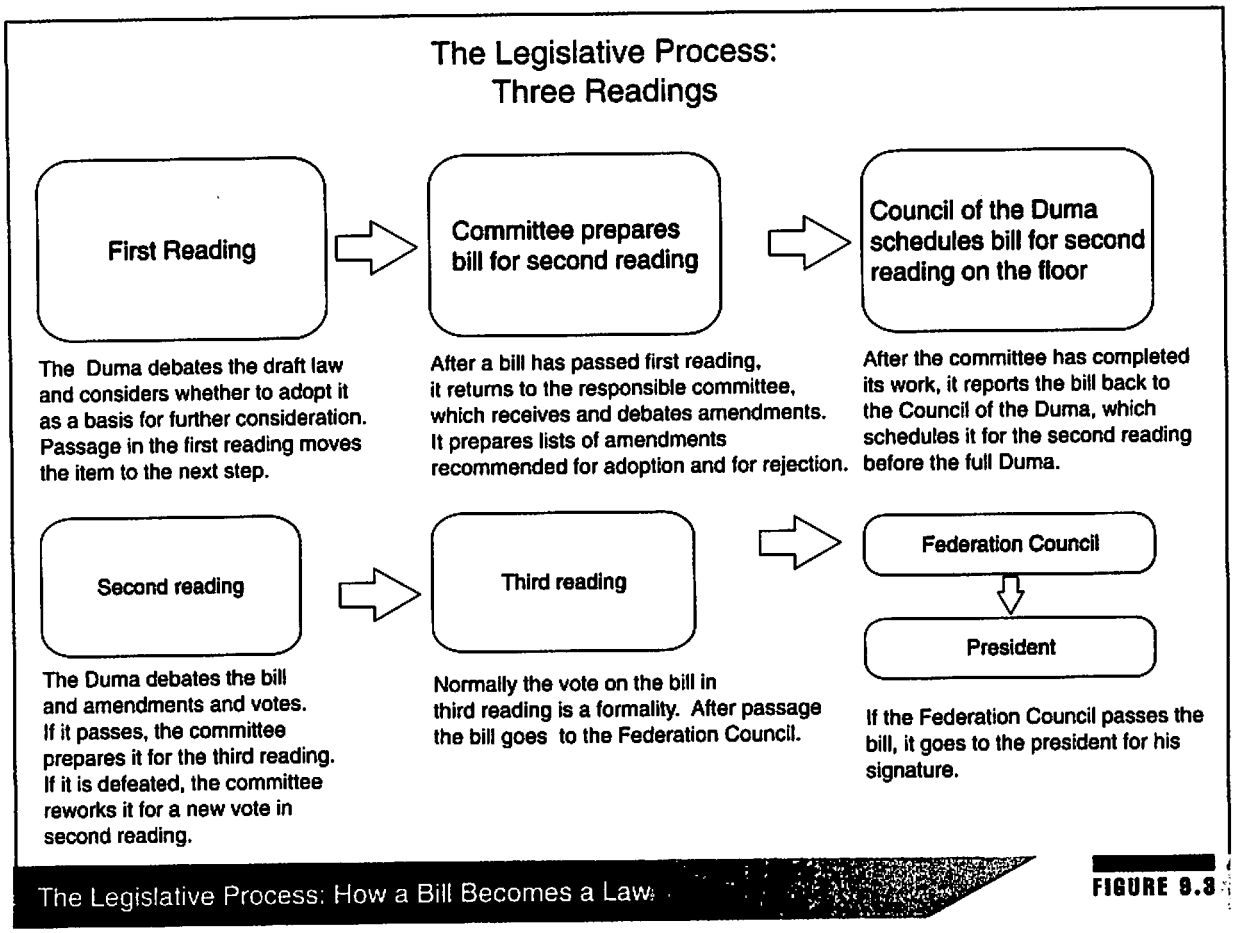
The *government* refers to the senior echelon of leadership in the executive branch and consists of the prime minister, a number of deputy prime ministers, and the heads of ministries and state agencies. It is charged with formulating the main lines of national policy (especially in the economic and social realms) and overseeing their implementation. (The president oversees the formulation and execution of foreign and national-security policy.) In this respect, the government corresponds to the Cabinet in Western parliamentary systems. But in contrast to most parliamentary systems, the makeup of the Russian government is not directly determined by the party composition of the parliament. Indeed, there is scarcely any relationship between the distribution of party forces in the Duma and the political balance of the government. Nearly all members of the government are career managers and administrators, rather than party politicians. Overall, the government is not a party government, but reflects the president's calculations about how to weigh considerations such as personal loyalty, professional competence, and the relative strength of major bureaucratic factions in selecting Cabinet ministers. Although there is recurrent discussion of the idea that the party that forms the majority in the Duma should have the right to name the head of the government, no president has been willing to agree to institute this arrangement—no doubt out of fear that it would reduce his freedom of action in governing.

The Parliament

The parliament—called the Federal Assembly—is bicameral. The lower house is called the **State Duma** and the upper house the **Federation Council**. Legislation originates in the Duma. As Figure 9.3 shows, upon passage in the State Duma, a bill goes to the Federation Council for consideration. The Federation Council can only pass it, reject it, or propose the formation of an agreement commission (consisting of members of both houses) to iron out differences. If the Duma rejects the upper house's proposed changes, it can override the Federation Council by a two-thirds vote and send the bill directly to the president for his signature.

When the bill has cleared parliament, it goes to the president. If the president refuses to sign the bill, it returns to the Duma. The Duma may pass an amended version by a simple absolute majority, or it may override the president's veto, for which a two-thirds vote is required. The Federation Council must then also approve the bill by a simple majority if the president's amendments are accepted or by a two-thirds vote if it chooses to override the president. On rare occasions—and never since 2000—the Duma has overridden the president's veto; it has overridden the Federation Council more frequently. In other cases, the Duma has passed bills rejected by the president after accepting the president's proposed amendments. Under President Yeltsin, opposition parties, particularly Communists and nationalists, held the majority in the Duma. But usually parliament and the president worked to head off major confrontations.

The Duma's 450 members are elected through proportional representation (PR) in a single national



The Legislative Process: How a Bill Becomes a Law

FIGURE 8.3

electoral district. A party receiving at least 7 percent of the vote on the party-list ballot is entitled to as many of the party-list seats in the Duma as its share of the party-list vote. As in other PR systems, votes cast for parties that fail to clear the barrier are redistributed to winning parties.[8]

The parties clearing the 7 percent threshold form their own factions in the Duma. According to newly amended Duma rules, deputies may not switch faction membership (those who leave or are expelled lose their seats). Faction leaders are represented in the governing body of the Duma, the Council of the Duma. Factions are the main site of political discussion in the Duma and give members a channel for proposing bills to the chamber.

Since the December 2003 elections, the Kremlin has enjoyed the support of a commanding majority in the Duma, where the **United Russia** party holds two-thirds of the seats. United Russia also holds twenty-six of the thirty-two committee chairmanships and eight of the eleven seats of the Council of the Duma, which is the steering body for the chamber. Since United Russia deputies vote with a high degree of discipline, the Duma consistently delivers the president solid legislative majorities. Other factions have very little opportunity to influence the agenda, let alone the outcomes of legislative deliberations. Therefore, United Russia's control over the agenda and voting has turned the Duma into a rubber stamp for the executive branch.

Each deputy is a member of one of thirty-two standing committees. Bills submitted to the Duma are assigned to committees according to their subject matter. The committees collect and review proposed amendments before reporting out the bills for votes by the full chamber with the committee's recommendations.

The Federation Council is designed as an instrument of federalism in that (as in the U.S. Senate) every constituent unit of the federation is represented by two representatives. Thus, the populations of small

territories are greatly overrepresented compared with more populous regions. The Federation Council has important powers. Besides acting on bills passed by the lower house, it approves presidential nominees for high courts, such as the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court. It must approve presidential decrees declaring martial law or a state of emergency and any acts altering the boundaries of territorial units. It must consider any legislation dealing with taxes, budget, financial policy, treaties, customs, and declarations of war.

The procedure for selecting members to the Federation Council has been changed several times. Currently, they are formally named by the governor and regional legislature of each territorial subject from among elected deputies of a local or regional legislative assembly. In practice, the appointments are made in close consultation with the Kremlin.

Executive–Legislative Relations

Relations between president and parliament during the 1990s were often stormy. The first two Dumas, elected in 1993 and in 1995, were dominated by the Communist and other leftist factions hostile to President Yeltsin and the policies of his government. This was particularly true in areas of economic policy and privatization. On other issues, such as matters concerning federal relations, the Duma and president often reached agreement—sometimes over the opposition of the Federation Council, whose members fought to protect regional prerogatives.

The 1999 election produced a Duma with a pro-government majority. President Putin and his government formed a reliable base of support in the Duma for their legislative initiatives by building a coalition of four centrist political factions. The 2003 election gave the president a still wider margin of support in the Duma and an overwhelming majority for the United Russia party—which means that the president does not need to expend much effort in bargaining with the Duma to win its support for his policies. The Fifth Duma, elected in December 2007, is also dominated by the United Russia party and has continued to give its loyal support to the Medvedev–Putin team.

The level of voting discipline within the majority party is similar to that in a Westminster-style parliament (i.e., a parliament modeled on the British Parliament). So is the practice of reliably supporting the government's initiatives. In reality, the relationship between the Duma and the government is quite different. In a Westminster-type setting, parliament and government have mutually offsetting powers. If a government loses its majority in parliament, it must face the voters in a new election. Majority members of parliament would prefer to hold onto their seats as long as possible and vote for the government's proposals so as to avoid a parliamentary dissolution and new election. By the same token, the government is normally unwilling to face a revolt on the floor of parliament and the possible loss of its majority. Thus, the government and the majority party need each other. In Russia, the parliamentary deputies have almost no political resources outside the party, and the presidential administration and government control the United Russia party—the majority party cannot counterbalance the executive. A deputy who defies party discipline can be expelled and has very few alternatives. In the future, though, a major shift in the alignment of political forces in society could lead to a different relationship between executive and legislative power.

The Judiciary and Law Enforcement

The major institutional actors in the legal system are the procuracy, the courts (judiciary), and the bar. Each has undergone substantial change in the post-Communist period.

The Procuracy Russia's legal system traditionally vested a great deal of power in the **procuracy**, which was considered to be the most prestigious branch of the legal system. The procuracy is comparable to the system of federal and state prosecuting attorneys in the United States, but it has wider-ranging responsibilities and is organized as a centralized hierarchy headed by the procurator-general. The procuracy is charged with fighting crime, corruption, and abuses of power in the bureaucracy. It seeks to ensure that all state officials and public organizations observe the law. It investigates criminal charges and prosecutes cases in court. The procuracy has traditionally been the principal check on abuses of power by state officials. But it is inadequately equipped to meet the sweeping responsibilities assigned to it because of the difficulty of effectively supervising the vast state bureaucracy. Although the procuracy is nominally independent of

the executive, the president names the procurator-general (subject to confirmation by the Federation Council) and informally supervises any politically significant cases.

The Judiciary In contrast to the influence that the procuracy has traditionally wielded in Russia, the bench has been relatively weak. Trial judges are usually the least-experienced and lowest-paid members of the legal profession—and the most vulnerable to external political and administrative pressure. In a few instances, judges have been murdered when they attempted to take on organized crime. Many judges have left their positions to take higher-paying jobs in other branches of the legal profession, and caseloads have risen substantially.

State officials pay lip service to the principle of judicial independence, but often violate it in practice by pressuring judges to render particular judgments in politically sensitive matters. At the same time, many reforms since the end of Communism are intended to make the administration of justice more effective, and some increase the rights of defendants in criminal cases. For example, in the 1990s, trial by jury in major criminal cases was introduced in several regions on an experimental basis and since then has spread throughout the country in serious criminal cases. The goal of adopting the jury system was to put the prosecution and the defense on an equal footing in the courtroom and to make the judge a neutral arbiter between them. The goal is to give the defendant a fairer chance in court. In a number of high-profile cases, juries have acquitted defendants when they found the procuracy's case unconvincing.

The Russian judiciary is a unitary hierarchy. All courts of general jurisdiction are federal courts. There are also other specialized types of courts in addition to federal courts of general jurisdiction—among them, the commercial courts, the constitutional courts of ethnic republics, the local municipal courts (equivalent to justices of the peace), and the military courts. Most criminal trials are held in district and city courts of general jurisdiction, which have original jurisdiction in most criminal proceedings. Higher-level courts, including regional and republic-level courts, hear appeals from lower courts and have original jurisdiction in certain cases. At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of courts of general jurisdiction is the Russian Supreme Court, which hears cases referred from lower courts and also issues instructions to lower courts on judicial matters. The Supreme Court does not have the power to challenge the constitutionality of laws and other official actions of legislative and executive bodies. The constitution assigns that power to the Constitutional Court. Under the constitution, the judges of the Supreme Court are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Federation Council.

There is a similar hierarchy of courts hearing cases arising from civil disputes between firms or between firms and the government called **commercial courts (*arbitrazhnye sudy*)**. Like the Supreme Court, the Supreme Commercial Court is both the highest appellate court for its system of courts and the source of instruction and direction to lower commercial courts. As with the Supreme Court, the judges of the Supreme Commercial Court are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Federation Council. In recent years, the Supreme Commercial Court has handed down a number of major decisions that clarify the rules of the economic marketplace.

The Ministry of Justice oversees the court system and provides for its material and administrative needs. Its influence over the legal system is limited, however, because it lacks any direct authority over the procuracy.

The Bar Change of another sort has been occurring among those members of the legal profession who represent individual citizens and organizations in both criminal and civil matters: advocates (*advokaty*). They are comparable to barristers in Great Britain and litigating attorneys in the United States. Their role has expanded considerably with the spread of the market economy. They have long enjoyed some autonomy through their self-governing associations, through which they elect officers and govern admission of new practitioners. In the past, their ability to use their rights was limited, but in recent years, their opportunities have risen markedly. Private law firms are proliferating. The profession is attractive for the opportunities it provides to earn high incomes. A number of lawyers have become celebrities by taking on high-profile cases.

The Constitutional Court

One of the most important reforms in post-Communist Russia's legal system has been the establishment of a court for constitutional review of the

official acts of government. The **Constitutional Court** has authority to interpret the constitution in a variety of areas. It has ruled on several ambiguous questions relating to parliamentary procedure. It has overturned some laws passed by national republics within Russia and has struck down several provisions of the Russian Criminal Code that limited individual rights. Generally, in disputes between individuals and state authorities, the court finds in favor of individuals, thus reaffirming the sphere of individual legal rights. It has consistently upheld the sovereignty of the federal constitution over regional governments.

The most important challenge for the court, however, is the huge domain of presidential authority. The court has been reluctant to challenge the president. One of its first and most important decisions concerned a challenge brought by a group of Communist parliamentarians to President Yeltsin's decrees launching the war in Chechnia. The court ruled that the president had the authority to wage the war through the use of his constitutional power to issue decrees with the force of law. In other, less highly charged issues, the court established legal limits to the president's authority. Since Putin took office in 2000, however, the court has taken care to avoid crossing the president. Nevertheless, even the possibility that it might exert a measure of independent political influence led Putin to move the seat of the court to St. Petersburg in 2008. This may have been intended as a means to distance the court from the tight web of governing bodies located in Moscow and thus to marginalize it politically.

Central Government and the Regions

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, many Russians feared that Russia would also dissolve into a patchwork of independent fiefdoms. Certainly, Russia's territorial integrity was subjected to serious strains. Under President Yeltsin, the central government granted wide autonomy to regional governments in return for political support. Yeltsin went so far as to sign a series of bilateral treaties with individual regions to codify the respective rights and responsibilities of the federal government and the given regional governments. Under Putin, however, the pendulum of federal policy swung back sharply toward centralization.

The demographic factor is one reason that Russia did not break up. Eighty percent of Russia's population is ethnically Russian. None of its ethnic minorities accounts for more than 4 percent of the total (the Tatars form the largest of the ethnic minorities). Rebuilding national community in post-Soviet Russia has been helped by Russia's thousand-year history of statehood. Yet until 1991, Russia was never constituted as a nation-state: Under the tsars it was a multinational empire, and under Soviet rule it was nominally a federal union of socialist republics. State policy toward nationality has also varied over the centuries. In some periods, Russia recognized a variety of self-governing ethnic-national communities and tolerated cultural differences among them. In other periods, the state pressured non-Russian groups to assimilate to Russian culture.

Russia was formally established as a federal republic under the Soviet regime. In contrast to the Soviet Union, of which it was the largest component, only some of Russia's constituent members were ethnic-national territories.[9] The rest were pure administrative subdivisions, populated mainly by Russians. The non-Russian ethnic-national territories were classified by size and status into autonomous republics, autonomous provinces, and national districts. In many of them, the indigenous ethnic group constituted a minority of the population. As of 2010, Russia comprises eighty-three constituent territorial units, officially termed "subjects of the federation." They represent six different types of units. Republics, autonomous districts (all but one of them located within other units), and the one autonomous *oblast* give formal political representation to ethnic minorities; *oblasts* (provinces), *krais* (territories), and two cities of federal status (Moscow and St. Petersburg) are treated as ordinary administrative subdivisions with no special constitutional status.

One of the centralizing measures President Putin pursued is the merger of smaller ethnic territories into larger surrounding units. In most of these cases, the smaller ethnic district was impoverished and hoped for better living standards by becoming part of a consolidated territory. The mergers also reduced the patronage rights and political voice that came with an ethnic district's status as a constituent unit of the federation.[10]

The ethnic republics jealously guard their special status. From 1990 to 1992, all the republics adopted declarations of sovereignty, and two made attempts to declare full or partial independence from Russia. Only

one, however, the Chechen Republic (**Chechnia**), resorted to arms to back up its claim. Chechnia is one of a belt of predominantly Muslim ethnic republics in the mountainous region of the North Caucasus, between the Black and Caspian seas. Chechnia's president declared independence from Russia in 1991, an act Russia refused to recognize but did not initially attempt to overturn by force. When negotiations failed, however, in December 1994, Russian forces attacked the republic directly, subjecting its capital city, Groznyi, to devastating bombardment. This forced tens of thousands of Chechen and Russian residents to flee and led to a protracted, destructive war. Fighting ceased in the summer of 1996, but resumed in 1999. Federal forces had established control over most parts of Chechnia by early 2000, but Chechen guerrillas continue to carry out ambushes and suicide attacks against federal units.

In the mid-1990s, a radical fundamentalist form of Islam replaced national independence as the guiding ideology of the Chechen rebel movement. The guerrillas have resorted to terrorist attacks, including suicide terrorism, against civilian targets both in the North Caucasus region and in Moscow. One of the most shocking of these incidents was the seizure of a school in the town of Beslan, near Chechnia, in September 2004 (see Box 9.3). The brutal methods used by federal forces to suppress the uprising have fueled continuing hatred on the part of many Chechens against the federal government, which, in turn, facilitates recruitment by the terrorists. With time, order has been restored under the sometimes brutal rule of Ramzan Kadyrov, and much of Groznyi has been rebuilt. Attacks and reprisals continue to occur occasionally, however. And throughout the North Caucasus region, unemployment and social dislocation are severe, creating a favorable milieu for religious radicalism and violence.

Chechnia, fortunately, was an exceptional case. In the other twenty ethnic republics, Moscow reached an accommodation granting the republics a certain amount of autonomy in return for acceptance of Russia's sovereign power. All twenty-one ethnic republics have the constitutional right to determine

BOX 9.3

Beslan

September 1 is the first day of school each year throughout Russia. Children, accompanied by their parents, often come to school bringing flowers to their teachers. A group organized by the Chechen warlord Shamil Basaev chose September 1, 2004, to carry out a horrific attack. A group of heavily armed militants stormed a school in the town of Beslan, located in the republic of North Ossetia, next door to Chechnia. They took over a thousand schoolchildren, parents, and teachers hostage. The terrorists crowded the captives into the school gymnasium, which they filled with explosives to prevent any rescue attempt. The terrorists refused to allow water and food to be brought into the school. Negotiations over the release of the hostages failed.

On the third day of the siege, something triggered the detonation of one of the bombs inside the school. In the chaos that followed, many of the children and adults rushed to escape. The terrorists fired at them. Federal forces stormed the school, trying to rescue the escaping hostages and to kill the terrorists. Many of the bombs planted by the terrorists exploded. Ultimately, about 350 of the hostages died, along with most of the terrorists.

The media covered the events extensively. The Beslan tragedy had an impact on Russian national consciousness comparable to that of September 11 in the United States. While there had been a number of previous attacks tied to Chechen terrorists, none had cost so many innocent lives.

Putin claimed that the terrorists were part of an international terrorist movement aimed ultimately at the dismemberment of Russia itself and avoided linking the incident to Russian policy in Chechnia. In response to the crisis, Putin called for measures to reinforce national security. He also demanded increased centralization of executive power, including an end to the direct election of governors. Most observers assumed that Putin had wanted to make these changes anyway and that the Beslan tragedy simply gave him a political opening to enact them. Beslan was a tragic indication that the insurgency that began in Chechnia was spreading throughout the North Caucasus region.

their own form of state power as long as their decisions do not contradict federal law. All twenty-one have established presidencies. In many cases, the republic presidents have constructed personal power bases around appeals to ethnic solidarity and the cultural autonomy of the indigenous nationality. They have often used this power to establish personalistic dictatorships in their regions.

President Putin made clear his intention to reassert the federal government's authority over the regions. Putin's decree of May 13, 2000, which created seven new "federal districts," was one of several steps in this direction.[11] He appointed a special presidential representative to each district who monitors the actions of the regional governments within that district. This reform sought to strengthen central control over the activity of federal bodies in the regions. In the past, local branches of federal agencies had often fallen under the influence of powerful governors.

Still another important measure was the abolition of direct popular election of governors, including the presidents of the ethnic republics. Before 2005, regional chief executives were chosen by direct popular election. Since 2005, however, the president nominates a candidate to the regional legislature, which then approves the nomination (no legislature has dared to oppose a presidential appointment). Many Russians supported this change, believing that the institution of local elections had been discredited by corruption and fraud and that elections were more often determined by the influence of wealthy insiders than by public opinion. Critics of the reform accused Putin of creating a hypercentralized, authoritarian system of rule. Putin clearly hoped that appointed governors would be more accountable and effective, but past experience suggests that centralizing power by itself is unlikely to improve governance in the regions in the absence of other mechanisms for monitoring government performance and for enforcing the law.

Below the tier of regional governments are units that are supposed to enjoy the right of self-government—municipalities and other local government units. Under new legislation, the right of local self-government has been expanded to a much larger set of units—such as urban and rural districts and small settlements—raising the total number of local self-governing units to 24,000. In principle, local self-government is supposed to permit substantial policymaking autonomy in the spheres of housing, utilities, and social services (and to reduce the federal government's burden in providing such services). However, the new legislation provides no fixed, independent sources of revenue for these local entities. They thus depend for the great majority of their budget revenues on the regional governments. For their part, the regional governments resist allowing local governments to exercise any significant powers of their own. In many cases, the mayors of the capital cities of regions are political rivals of the governors of the regions. Moscow and St. Petersburg are exceptional cases because they have the status of federal territorial subjects, like republics and regions. Elsewhere, city governments must bargain with their superior regional governments for shares of power. Moreover, the centralizing trend of the 2000s has extended to local government as an increasing number of localities have replaced elected mayors with appointed ones or city managers.

Russia's post-Communist constitutional arrangements are still evolving. The political system allows considerable room for the arbitrary exercise of power and the evisceration of democracy. Both Yeltsin and Putin interpreted their presidential mandates broadly, and although President Medvedev repeatedly calls for adherence to the rule of law, he has also continued the practice of relying heavily on informal powers. Executives at lower levels, particularly in the regions, take similarly expansive views of their powers. But while Russia remains a long way from the ideal of the rule of law, the post-Communist regime has allowed far more open competition and consultation among organized social groups than did the Communist regime. The limits of allowable debate and criticism are far wider than in the Soviet era, and there is far more open articulation and aggregation of interests.

The constitutional arrangements originally established after the end of the Communist regime are likely to evolve further over the long run, depending on the balance of power in state and society. If President Medvedev is successful in bringing about liberalization in the economy and political system as part of his drive to modernize the country, the dispersion of power in civil society will gradually bring about greater formal constraints on state power and greater respect for the formal constitutional rules. But a change of leadership, or a spell of economic recovery fueled by high world oil prices, could easily stifle the impulse for political reform.

Under Vladimir Putin, Russia's system of rule became a hybrid regime that includes elements of

democracy within a largely authoritarian framework. In this system, elections are held regularly, and opposition forces are allowed a small, marginal role. The ruling authorities decide how much freedom to allow opposition groups to organize and campaign, and they exercise substantial control over television and radio, although allowing much greater freedom to the print and Internet media. Business is given wide sway to pursue its economic interests, but may not finance a political challenge to the authorities. Civil society organizations can offer policy proposals for debate. But elections are not a means for deciding who governs; the ruling authorities rarely allow elections to produce unplanned results. Moreover, corruption is rampant, and the state bureaucracy remains inefficient and poorly controlled. The centralization of power in the 2000s has been much more effective at pushing political opposition to the sidelines than at giving the authorities an independent means of controlling the bureaucracy.

Yeltsin and Putin used presidential power very differently without changing the formal rules of the constitution. Yeltsin ruled erratically and impulsively, but he respected certain limits on his power: He did not suppress media criticism, and he tolerated political opposition.[12] Faced with an opposition-led parliament, Yeltsin was willing to compromise with his opponents to enact legislation. However, Yeltsin grew dependent on a small group of favored **oligarchs** (business magnates with strong connections to government) for support and allowed them to accumulate massive fortunes and corrupt influence. Likewise, Yeltsin allowed regional bosses to flout federal authority with impunity because he found it less costly to accommodate them than to fight them. The loss of state capacity under Yeltsin illustrates one danger of an overcentralized political system. When the president does not effectively command the powers of the office, power drifts to other centers of authority.

Putin's presidency illustrates the opposite danger. When Putin took over, he undertook to reverse the breakdown of political control and responsibility in the state. Although publicly he called for a system based on respect for the rule of law, he restored authoritarian methods of rule. And although Dmitrii Medvedev often refers to freedom and democracy as necessary for Russia, the actual changes he has introduced to its political system are extremely modest.

RUSSIAN POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

Russian political culture is the product of centuries of autocratic rule, rapid but uneven improvement of educational and living standards in the twentieth century, and rising exposure to Western standards of political life. The resulting contemporary political culture is a contradictory bundle of values: A sturdy core of belief in democratic values is accompanied by a firm belief in the importance of a strong state together with deep mistrust of most actual state institutions. In a 2005 survey, 66 percent of Russians agreed that "Russia needs democracy," but 45 percent said that the kind of democracy Russia needs is "a completely special kind corresponding to Russian specifics."[13] A survey shortly before the December 2007 election found that almost two-thirds of the public did not believe the elections would be free or fair; yet a majority believed that their lives would improve thanks to the elections.[14] Asked whether they believed they could have any influence on policy decisions in the country, 83 percent said no.[15] But two-thirds of voters thought that democratic elections are at least somewhat important to the country, and a majority said that as president, Dmitrii Medvedev would pursue policies that would strengthen democracy.[16] Can such contradictory beliefs about democracy be reconciled?

We must remember that Russians judge democracy and other forms of government according to their ability to make the Russian state more effective at providing stability, order, and security. Many Russians cannot forgive Gorbachev and Yeltsin for pursuing policies that led to the breakup of the Soviet state, widespread poverty, the amassing of great wealth by a few individuals using unscrupulous methods, and the loss of status as a great world power. Some even believe that the ideals of democracy and the market economy represented misguided or malicious efforts to remold Russia along Western lines. The restoration of the state's power and prestige, therefore, is a criterion for judging the worth of democracy.

Democracy is also judged by its ability to benefit individuals materially. Asked in a recent survey what freedoms were most important to them *personally*, over half the respondents named the "freedom to be protected by the state in case of illness, loss of work, or poverty" and the "freedom to purchase what I want" as the most important; freedoms such as the right to vote

for competing political parties or to participate in political demonstrations were named by only 13 percent and 10 percent, respectively.[17] In addition, 46 percent named the freedom to choose their job as being important to them personally, but only 30 percent named freedom of religion as personally important, while 38 percent named the freedom to acquire property such as real estate and a car as important.

This pragmatic view of democracy helps explain why many Russians praise Putin for strengthening democracy and praise Medvedev for continuing his policies. Far from seeing "freedom" and "order" as necessary enemies, many recognize that freedom is possible only in an ordered society. But if forced to choose *between* freedom and order, Russians divide rather evenly. For example, in an international survey, 47 percent of Russians (compared with 40 percent internationally) said that stability and peace are more important concerns than freedom of the press, whereas 39 percent (versus 56 percent globally) gave priority to press freedom.[18]

We can understand these competing influences on Russian political culture when we consider the long-term forces shaping it, as well as the impact of recent history.

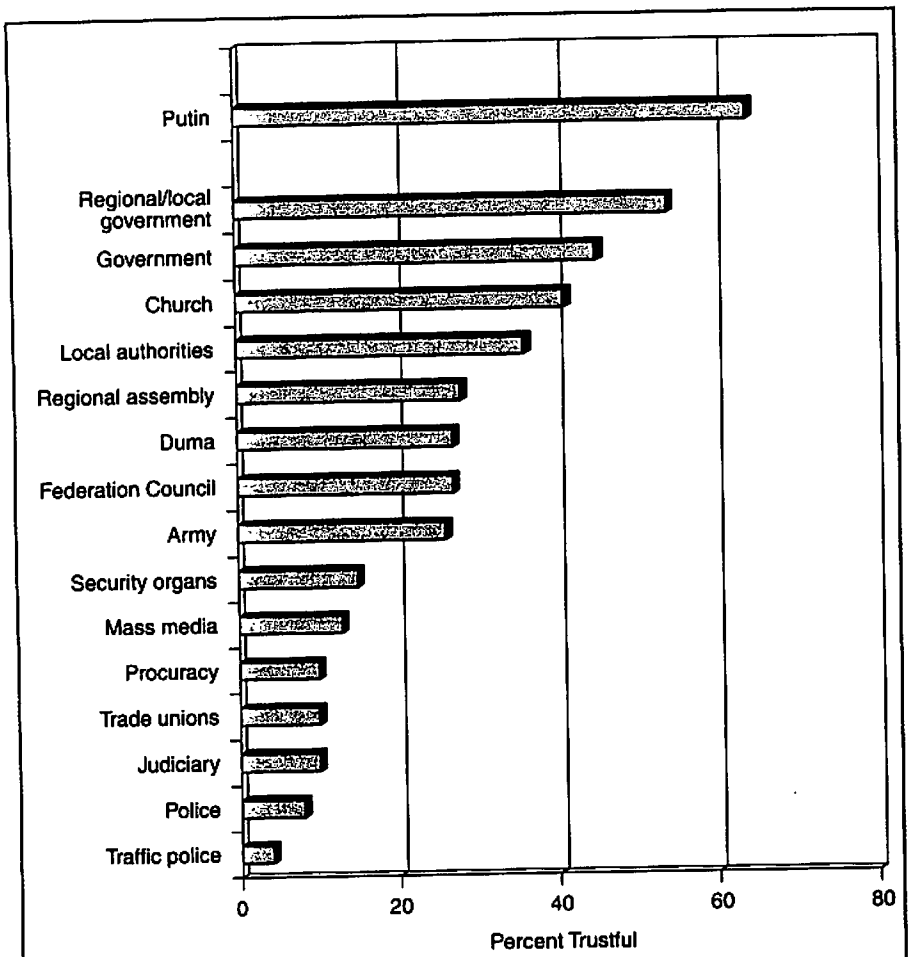
The reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s raised expectations that Russia would enjoy a significant rise in living standards once it got rid of communism. The sharp fall in living standards that followed the collapse of the old regime dispelled any notion that changing the political and economic systems could turn the country around overnight.

However, the decade of economic recovery and political stability after 1999 erased much of the nostalgia for the old Soviet order and increased optimism. In December 2007, 40 percent of Russians reported that they were looking ahead to 2008 with optimism; a year before, only 30 percent expressed optimism about the coming year.[19] More people were willing to look back and say that the radical reforms of the economy beginning in 1992 brought greater good than harm.[20] And 61 percent were willing to say that it was a good thing that Russia became independent of the Soviet Union. Ten years before, only 27 percent thought so.[21] On the other hand, the devastating economic crisis beginning in 2008 weakened the sense of confidence most people were feeling about the future. A June 2010 survey found that almost three quarters of the population saw the current economic situation as a crisis and 11 percent saw it as "catastrophic."[22]

One reason Russians take a conditional view of the value of democratic rights is the widespread belief that political order is fragile, a view that the authorities have worked hard to keep alive. Russians have long been taught that a weakening of the internal cohesion of the state invites predation from outside powers, and many episodes of Russian history bear out this belief. The Putin leadership pointed to the popular uprisings in Ukraine, Georgia, and elsewhere not as signs of a democratic spirit in the face of attempted election fraud by local strongmen, but as proof that outside powers (such as the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) were fomenting unrest in order to overthrow the legitimate state authorities. Asked what they consider the main internal threat facing Russia today, Russians expressed fear about political instability connected with political succession (16 percent), struggle among competing factions in power (12 percent), loss of control by the central government over the regions (9 percent), separatism in the North Caucasus (4 percent), and loss of control over the regions in the Far East located near China (4 percent).[23]

Surveys also show that citizens have little faith in most present-day political institutions, although, as Figure 9.4 shows, they have a good deal of confidence in the president and government. Confidence in elective bodies such as the parliament is low, and in the law enforcement and security organs it is even lower, while it is higher in local and regional government and higher still in the Orthodox Church. The great majority of Russians believe that they are not protected from arbitrary treatment by the state; only a quarter of the population say that they feel any sense of protection from abuse at the hands of the police, courts, tax authorities, and other state structures.[24]

Still, although Russians placed more faith in Putin and Medvedev than in other political institutions, they also recognized the value of some constitutional constraints on presidential power. Few Russians thought that power should transfer with Putin from the presidency to the prime ministership; two-thirds preferred maintaining a system of "strong presidential power."[25] Nor did most Russians want to see presidential power increased.[26] As Figure 9.5 shows, Russians believe by a wide margin that there should be a political opposition to the authorities. Russians exhibit a strong sense of skepticism about and mistrust of most institutions of the state; yet by a two-to-one margin, most Russians believe they cannot solve their problems without it.[27]



Political Trust

Confidence in President Putin was far higher than in other institutions, and regional government is rated more highly than national institutions.

FIGURE 9.4

Sources: Putin trust: Fond obshchestvennogo mnenila, July 2008. Retrieved July 11, 2008, from http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/projects/dominant/dom0826/d082621#Abs3. All other items: Fund for Public Opinion, May 2007. Retrieved July 11, 2008, from http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/power/pow_rei/d071901.

Most accept that the state requires firm guidance by a capable president, and they give Putin credit for having restored order and purpose to the state. Therefore, although there continues to be a strong foundation of support for democratic values, that support is contingent on whether these values will help hold the country together or pull it apart.

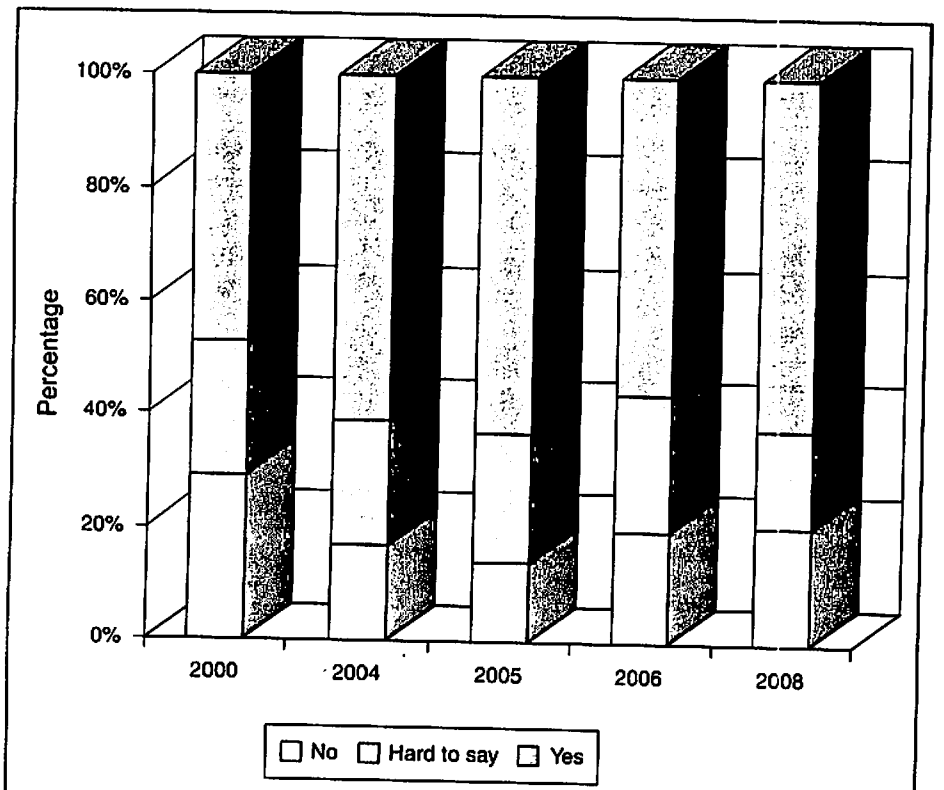
The political culture thus combines contradictory elements. Russians do value democratic rights, but experience has taught them that under the banner of democracy, politicians can abuse their power to the detriment of the integrity of the state and the well-being of society. They also feel powerless to affect state policy. Little wonder that a leader such as Putin, who is associated with the restoration of order and predictability, can command such widespread support despite the general mistrust Russians have for their political institutions.

Surveys also reveal considerable continuity with the past in support of the idea that the state should ensure society's prosperity and the citizens' material security. More so than residents of Western Europe or the United States, Russians believe that the state is responsible for providing a just moral and social order, with justice being understood more as social equality than as equality before the law. This pattern reflects the lasting influence of traditional conceptions of state and society on Russian political culture.

Political culture is also shaped by slower-acting but more lasting influences, including the succession of generations, rising educational levels, and urbanization. These are mutually reinforcing changes as new generations of young people are exposed to fundamentally different influences than those to which their parents were exposed.

Political Socialization

The Soviet regime devoted enormous effort to political indoctrination and propaganda. The regime controlled the content of school curricula, mass media, popular culture, political education, and nearly every other channel by which values and attitudes were



Does Russia Need a Political Opposition?
Russians broadly agree that a political opposition is needed.

FIGURE 8.6

Note: Percentages are percentages of those responding.
Source: Levada Center, "Politicheskaia oppozitsiia v Rossii," July 2008. Retrieved July 11, 2008, from www.levada.ru/press/2008073102.html.

formed. The heart of Soviet doctrine was the Marxist belief that the way in which a society organizes economic production—feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and so forth—determines the structure of values and beliefs prevalent in the society. The idea was that the ruling class in each society determines the basic ideology of the society. Therefore, Soviet propaganda and indoctrination emphasized that Soviet citizens were part of a worldwide working-class movement to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism, in which there would be no private property. Needing to knit together a highly diverse multinational state, the Soviet regime downplayed national feeling and replaced it with a sense of patriotic loyalty to the Soviet state and to the working class's interests in the worldwide class struggle.

Today the ideological content of Russian education has changed significantly, and there is much less overt political control over the formation of attitudes and values. In place of the idea of the class struggle and the international solidarity of the working class, textbooks stress love for the Russian national heritage. Historical figures who in the Communist era were honored as heroes of the struggle of ordinary people against feudal or capitalist masters are now held up as great representatives of Russia's national culture.[28] Schoolbooks and mass media place heavy emphasis on loyalty to Russia as a state. This theme underlies Russia's effort to create a new sense of national community within the country's post-Soviet state boundaries.

The authorities have also turned to the Orthodox Church as an aid in political socialization. They regard the Church as a valuable ally in building patriotic loyalty, national pride, and a framework of ethical values. The Church, in turn, seeks to protect its traditional status as Russia's state church, enabling it to block other Christian denominations from proselytizing in Russia. There has been an ongoing debate over whether to make Russian Orthodoxy the foundation for ethics instruction in the schools. As of spring 2010, for example, a new course was introduced into the curriculum of nineteen regions. All fourth- and fifth-graders must take a course on "the fundamentals of religious culture and ethics," but their families may choose among several different versions of the course, each using a different textbook. Options include textbooks based on Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Jewish beliefs, as well as one oriented to secular ethics. According to the Ministry of Education, by far the largest number of requests came in for the secular ethics book—only 20 percent of families

requested the Orthodox Christian version. The Orthodox Church, however, disputes the government's figures.[29]

The Church's rising influence in the schools has prompted a backlash among many intellectuals, who protest that teaching religion in the schools violates the constitutional provision that Russia is a secular state. But many people, whether religious or not, deplore the decay of morals in society and the relentless rise of consumerism and materialism as Russia opens itself to the global capitalist system. They see the Church, with its long history of partnership with the state, as a way of restoring traditional moral values in society.

In the 1990s, the regime generally respected media freedom. Private businesses bought many formerly state-owned media outlets or created new ones, and a wide range of expression of news and opinion was available. Under Putin, the authorities moved to set limits on the media (particularly television), but they did not institute an elaborate political socialization system such as the Soviet state employed. Nevertheless, the authorities have used the media to build support for their foreign and domestic policies. The overall political line under Putin and Medvedev has been that Russia is rejecting totalitarian communism on the one hand and unbridled oligarchic capitalism on the other, and is restoring continuity with the best traditions of Russia's political history. Both, however, have repeatedly insisted that Russia must make use of democracy and capitalism, although in its own way.

The media system is stratified. Television reaches almost everyone and is by far the most important source of news for the population. Accordingly, it is subjected to the tightest political control by the authorities, who give the editors of the main broadcast programs regular guidance on what to cover and what not to cover. Print and online media are allowed much more freedom, but they reach a far smaller audience, so they are of less immediate concern to the authorities.[30] Aware of the stultifying effects of the old Soviet system of ideological control over communications, the authorities' strategy is defensive, in that they want to prevent organized groups from challenging their claim to power rather than being overtly ideological.

Russian political socialization is therefore much less subject to direct state control than it was in the Soviet era; and even then, awareness of the political and economic standards of the outside world filtered into the consciousness of the Soviet population. Today's authorities want to use schools and communications media to build loyalty to the state and its leaders, confidence in the future, and acceptance of a centralized regime, while at the same time spurring Russians to modernize the economy. At the same time, they want to prevent the media from being an arena of open political contestation.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In Russia, there is much less direct political participation (such as voting, canvassing for a candidate, or collecting signatures for a petition) than in Western democracies, as well as less indirect participation (such as holding membership in civic groups and voluntary associations). Democracy requires both forms of participation. Participation in civic life builds social capital—reciprocal bonds of trust and obligation among citizens that facilitate collective action. Where social capital is abundant, people treat one another as equals rather than as members of social hierarchies. They are more willing to cooperate in ways that benefit the society and improve the quality of government by sharing the burden of making government accountable and effective.[31] People are more willing to pay their taxes, so government has more revenue to spend on public goods—and less ability and less incentive to divert it into politicians' pockets. The success of capitalism and democratic government rests on citizens' ability to cooperate for the common good.

In Russia, however, social capital has historically been scarce, compared with West European societies, and participation in civic activity has been extremely limited. Moreover, state and society have generally been separated by mutual mistrust and suspicion. State authorities have usually stood outside and above society, extracting what resources they needed from society but not cultivating ties of obligation to it. The Communist regime further depleted the stock of social capital by coopting associations useful for the state and repressing those that threatened its interests. Therefore, social capital not only in Russia but also throughout the former Communist Bloc is significantly lower than in other parts of the world.[32]

The weakness of intermediate associations linking political elites to ordinary citizens widens the felt

distance between state and society. Thus, although Russians turn out to vote in elections in relatively high numbers, participation in organized forms of political activity is low. Opinion polls show that most people believe that their involvement in political activity is futile, and they have little confidence that they can influence government policy through their participation. Although there was an intense surge in political involvement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when controls over political expression and association were lifted, it ebbed substantially.

Membership in voluntary associations in contemporary Russia is extremely low. According to survey data, 91 percent of the population does not belong to any sports or recreational club, literary or other cultural group, political party, local housing association, or charitable organization. About 9 percent report attending church at least once a month, and about 20 percent say that they are members of trade unions. Attending religious services and being a member of a trade union are very passive forms of participation in public life. Yet even when these and other types of participation are taken into account, almost 60 percent of the population still is outside any voluntary public associations.[33] For example, today some 87 percent of Russian Orthodox believers are not members of a congregation, going to church only occasionally.[34]

This is not to say that Russian citizens are *psychologically* disengaged from public life or that they are socially isolated. Half of the Russian adult population reports reading national newspapers "regularly" or "sometimes," and almost everyone watches national television "regularly" (81 percent). Sixty-nine percent read local newspapers "regularly" or "sometimes." Sixty-six percent discuss the problems of the country with friends "regularly" or "sometimes," and 48 percent say that people ask them their opinions about what is happening in the country. A similar percentage of people discuss the problems of their city with friends.[35] Russians do vote in high proportions in national elections—higher in fact than do their American counterparts.[36]

Moreover, Russians prize their right *not* to participate in politics. Today's low levels of political participation are a reflection of the low degree of confidence in political institutions and the widespread view that ordinary individuals have little influence over government. In the 2003 Duma elections, 4.7 percent of the voters expressed their dissatisfaction with the array of choices offered by checking the box marked "against all" on the party-list ballot.[37] But the authorities worried that this was too attractive a means of expressing disaffection and eliminated the option from later elections.

Elite Recruitment

Elite recruitment refers to the institutional processes in a society by which people gain access to positions of influence and responsibility. Elite recruitment is closely tied to political participation because it is through participation in community activity that people take on leadership roles, learn civic skills (such as organization and persuasion), develop networks of friends and supporters, and become interested in pursuing political careers.

In the Soviet regime, the link between participation and elite recruitment was highly formalized. The Communist Party recruited the population into a variety of officially sponsored organizations, such as the Communist Party, youth leagues, trade unions, and women's associations. Through such organizations, the regime identified potential leaders and gave them experience in organizing group activity. The party reserved the right to approve appointments to any positions that carried high administrative responsibility or that were likely to affect the formation of public attitudes. The system for recruiting, training, and appointing individuals for positions of leadership and responsibility in the regime was called the ***nomenklatura*** system. Those individuals who were approved for the positions on *nomenklatura* lists were informally called "the *nomenklatura*." Many citizens regarded them as the ruling class in Soviet society.

The democratizing reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s made two important changes to the process of elite recruitment. First, the old *nomenklatura* system crumbled along with other Communist Party controls over society. Second, although most members of the old ruling elites adapted themselves to the new circumstances and stayed on in various official capacities, the wave of new informal organizations and popular elections brought many new people into elite positions. Today, the contemporary Russian political elite consists of a mixture of career types: those who worked their way up through the state bureaucracy and those who entered politics through other channels, such as elective politics or business.

President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin Confer at the Kremlin

Formally, the prime minister reports to the president, but the actual lines of accountability are unclear under the tandem leadership of Putin and Medvedev.

Ria Novosti/Kremlin Pool/epa/Corbis

Today, some of the old Soviet institutional mechanisms for recruitment are being restored. In the Communist regime, the party maintained schools to train political leaders, where rising officials received a combination of management education and political indoctrination. Today, most of those schools serve a similar function as academies for training civil servants and are overseen by the presidential administration. The authorities are working to systematize the selection and training of officials in order to ensure that a competent and politically reliable cadre is available for recruitment, not only to state bureaucratic positions but even for management positions in major firms.[38]

There are two major differences between elite recruitment in the Communist regime and that in the present. The *nomenklatura* system of the Soviet regime ensured that in every walk of life, those who held positions of power and responsibility were approved by the party. They thus formed different sections of a single political elite and owed their positions to their political loyalty and usefulness. Today, however, there are multiple elites (political, business, professional, cultural, etc.), reflecting the greater degree of pluralism in post-Soviet society.

Second, there are multiple channels for recruitment to today's *political* elite. Many of its members come from positions in the federal and regional executive agencies. Putin relied heavily on the police (the regular police and the security services) and the military as sources of personnel for his senior-level appointments.[39] He also turned to colleagues with whom he had worked closely in St. Petersburg in the 1990s. This pattern of close patron–client relations, where a rising politician brings members of his "team" with him each time he moves up the career ladder, is a common feature of elite recruitment in Russia. One effect is to generate competition between rival groups of clients, sometimes called "clans." In Russia's case, there has been persistent behind-the-scenes rivalry between two such clans, both composed of associates of Putin. One is close to the security services, while the other, with a slightly more liberal cast, is made up of trained lawyers. When Putin chose Medvedev as his anointed successor, it was seen as a serious blow against the first group.

The Soviet elite recruitment system produced many of today's successful businesspeople as old-guard bureaucrats discovered ways to cash in on their political contacts and get rich quickly. Money from the Communist Party found its way into the establishment of many new business ventures. Insiders took advantage of their contacts to obtain business licenses, office space, and exclusive contracts with little difficulty. Some bought (at bargain basement prices) controlling interests in state firms that were undergoing privatization; a few years later, these insiders became millionaires.

Today's business elite is closely tied to the state, both because state officials keep business on a short leash and because business provides material and

political benefits to officials. In some cases, bureaucratic factions form around particular enterprises and industries, such as the oil or gas industry. Businesses need licenses, permits, contracts, exemptions, and other benefits from government. Political officials, in turn, need financial contributions to their campaigns, political support, favorable media coverage, and other benefits that business can provide. In the 1990s, the close and collusive relations between many businesses and government officials nurtured widespread corruption and the meteoric rise of a small group of business tycoons, or oligarchs. They took advantage of their links to Yeltsin's administration to acquire control of some of Russia's most valuable companies. The prominence of the newly rich fed a public backlash that made it politically viable for Putin to suppress some of them and destroy their business empires by police methods. And in many cases, the state takeover of private firms ended up concentrating wealth and power in the hands of well-connected state officials (often from the security services), who have treated the firms as private fiefdoms rather than increasing their productivity or accountability.

INTEREST ARTICULATION: BETWEEN STATISM AND PLURALISM

The political and economic changes of the last two decades in Russia have had a powerful impact on the way social interests are organized. A diverse spectrum of interest associations has developed. The pattern of interest articulation, however, reflects the powerful impact of state control over society as well as the sharp disparities in wealth and power that formed during the transition period. A few organizations have considerable influence in policymaking, while other groups have little.

The Communist regime did not tolerate the open pursuit of any interests except those authorized by the state. Interest organizations—such as trade unions, youth groups, professional societies, and the like—were closely supervised by the Communist Party. Glasnost' upset this statist model of interest articulation by setting off an explosion of political expression. This, in turn, prompted new groups to form and to make political demands. It is hard today to imagine how profound the impact of glasnost' was on Soviet society. Almost overnight, it opened the floodgates to a growing stream of startling facts, ideas, disclosures, reappraisals, and scandals. In loosening the party's controls over communication sufficiently to encourage people to speak and write freely and openly, the regime also relinquished the controls that would have enabled it to rein in political expression when it went too far.

As people voiced their deep-felt demands and grievances, others recognized that they shared the same beliefs and values and made common cause with them, sometimes forming new, unofficial organizations. Therefore, one result of glasnost' was a wave of participation in "informal"—that is, unlicensed and uncontrolled—public associations. When the authorities tried to limit or prohibit such groups, they generated still more frustration and protest. Associations of all sorts formed, including ultranationalists who wanted to restore tsarism and nationalist movements in many republics. The explosion of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in 1986 had a tremendous impact in stimulating the formation of environmental protest, linked closely to nationalist sentiment in Belarus and Ukraine.[40]

The elimination of the state's monopoly on productive property resulted in the formation of new interests, among them those with a stake in the market economy. Now groups can form to represent a diversity of interests, compete for access to influence and resources, and define their own agendas. The Justice Ministry estimates that there are nearly half a million NGOs, although probably no more than a quarter of them are active at any given time.[41]

In some cases, NGOs are the successors of recognized associations of the old regime, such as official trade unions. Often, these groups cling to their inherited organizational assets and continue to seek "insider" access to the state. Other groups sprang up during the glasnost' period or later, but must cooperate with local authorities in order to gain access to meeting places and media attention.

There were elements of corporatism in the state's relations with interest groups under Putin because of the regime's preference for dealing directly with controllable umbrella organizations representing particular segments of society. An example is the formation of the Public Chamber to create a state-approved platform for the activity of selected NGOs. Operating within the limits set by the regime, the Public Chamber has been able to serve to some extent as a

channel of communication between the public and the authorities. Similar chambers have been created in many regions. Overall, however, the pattern of interest group activity is more pluralist than corporatist because in most cases interest associations are too numerous, too weak internally, and too competitive for corporatism to succeed. But under Putin, interest articulation did become more statist as the regime gradually increased political controls on nongovernmental associations.

A law enacted at the beginning of 2006 imposed new restrictions on NGOs, making it easier for the authorities to deny them registration and to shut them down. At the same time, the authorities warned that foreign intelligence services were sponsoring Russian NGOs for the purposes of intelligence-gathering and subversion. The political atmosphere for NGOs became considerably chillier.

Let us consider three examples of associational groups: the **Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE)**, the **League of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers**, and the **Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FITUR)**. They illustrate different strategies for organization and influence and different relationships to the state.

The Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs

Most former state-owned industrial firms are now wholly or partly privately owned. Most industrial firms participate in a competitive market (and increasingly globalized) economic environment. Under the socialist regime, managers were told to fulfill the plan regardless of cost or quality. Profit was not a relevant consideration.[42] Now most managers seek to maximize profits and increase the value of their firms. Although many still demand subsidies and protection from the state, an increasing number want an environment where laws and contracts are enforced by the state, regulation is reasonable and honest, taxes are fair (and low), and barriers to foreign trade are minimized. These changes are visible in the political interests of the association that represents the interests of big business in Russia, the RUIE. The RUIE is the single most powerful organized interest group in Russia. Its membership comprises both the old state industrial firms (now mostly private or quasi-private) and new private firms and conglomerates.

In the early 1990s, the RUIE's lobbying efforts were aimed at winning continued state support of industrial firms, but with time, the RUIE has become the leading voice of big business in the market system. The RUIE helps broker agreements between business and labor, and it is a source of policy advice for government and parliament. All the major industrial firms—including those of the oligarchs—belong to the RUIE and do much of their lobbying through it. Of course, on matters that concern individual firms, those businesses still seek to influence policy on their own.

Over time, the RUIE's role has changed, according to the opportunities and limits set by the state authorities. It has expanded its in-house capacity for working with the government in drafting legislation. On a number of policy issues, such as tax law, pension policy, bankruptcy legislation, regulation of the securities market, and the terms of Russia's entry to the WTO, the RUIE has been active and influential. For the most part, it works behind the scenes to lobby for its interests, but occasionally, if it feels its voice has been ignored, it applies pressure more publicly.

Yet the limits of the RUIE's power as the collective voice of big business are clear. When the Putin regime began its campaign to destroy the Yukos oil firm starting in July 2003 (see Box 9.4), the RUIE confined itself to mild expressions of concern. Its members, evidently fearful of crossing Putin, chose not to defend Yukos's head, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, or to protest the use of police methods to destroy one of Russia's largest oil companies. Instead, they promised to meet their tax obligations and to do more to help the country fight poverty. Perhaps if big business had taken a strong, united stand, it could have influenced state policy. But the desire by each individual firm to maintain friendly relations with the government, and the fear of government reprisals, undercut big business's capacity for collective action.

The League of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers

The Soviet regime sponsored several official women's organizations, but these mainly served propaganda purposes. During the glasnost' period, a number of unofficial women's organizations sprang up. One such group was the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. It formed in the spring of 1989, when some 300 women in Moscow rallied to protest the end of student deferments from military conscription. Their protest came

Mikhail Khodorkovsky

BOX 9.4

One of the most widely publicized episodes of the Putin era was the state takeover of the powerful private oil company, Yukos, and the criminal prosecution of its head, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. At the time of his arrest in October 2003, Khodorkovsky was the wealthiest of Russia's new post-Communist magnates. His career began in the late 1980s when he started a bank. Later he acquired—at a bargain-basement price—80 percent of the shares of the Yukos oil company when the government privatized it. At first, Khodorkovsky sought to squeeze maximum profit from the firm by stripping its assets. Soon, his business strategy changed, and he began to invest in the firm's productive capacity. He made Yukos the most dynamic of Russia's oil companies. As he improved the efficiency and transparency of the firm, the share prices rose and, with them, Khodorkovsky's own net worth. At its peak in 2002, the company's assets were estimated at about $20 billion, of which Khodorkovsky owned nearly $8 billion.

Seeking to improve his public image, Khodorkovsky created a foundation and launched several charitable initiatives. He became active in Russian politics, helping to fund political parties and sponsoring the election campaigns of several Duma deputies. Critics accused him of wanting to control parliament and even of wanting to change the constitution to turn it into a parliamentary system. There was talk that he intended to seek the presidency.

By spring 2003, the Putin administration decided that Khodorkovsky and Yukos had grown too independent. Several top figures in Yukos and associated companies were arrested and charged with fraud, embezzlement, tax evasion, and even murder. In December 2003, the government began issuing claims against the company for billions of dollars in back taxes and froze the company's bank accounts as collateral against the claims. When Yukos failed to pay the full tax bill, the government seized its main production subsidiary and auctioned it off to a firm that, three days later, sold it to Russia's only state-owned oil company, Rosneft'. In October 2003, Khodorkovsky was arrested and charged with fraud and tax evasion. He was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment and sent to a prison camp in Siberia. In 2006, the last remnants of the company were forced into bankruptcy. In 2008, the authorities pressed a new set of charges that added another six years to his sentence.

Whatever the regime's motives—political, economic, or both—the Yukos affair shows that the authorities are willing to manipulate the legal system for political purposes when it suits them and that the fight to redistribute control of Russia's natural resource assets remains a driving force in politics.

on the heels of Gorbachev's withdrawal of Soviet forces from the decade-long war in Afghanistan, where over 13,000 Soviet troops were killed. In response to the actions by the Soldiers' Mothers, Gorbachev agreed to restore student deferments. Since then, the Soldiers' Mothers' movement has grown, with local branches forming in hundreds of cities and joining together in the League of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers. Their focus remains centered on the problems of military service. The league presses the military to end the brutal hazing of recruits, which results in the deaths (in many cases by suicide) of hundreds of soldiers each year. The league also advises young men on how to avoid being conscripted.[43]

The onset of large-scale hostilities in Chechnia in 1994 through 1996 and 1999 through 2000 stimulated a new burst of activity by the league. It helped families locate soldiers who were missing in action or captured by the Chechen rebel forces. It sent missions to Chechnia to negotiate for the release of prisoners and to provide proper burial for the dead. It collected information about the actual scale of the war and of its casualties. It also continued to lobby for decent treatment of recruits. Through the 1990s, it became one of the most sizeable and respected civic groups in Russia. It can call on a network of thousands of active volunteers for its work. One of the movement's greatest assets is its members' moral authority as mothers defending the interests of their children. This stance makes it hard for their opponents to paint them as unpatriotic.

The league plays both a public political role (for instance, it lobbied to liberalize the law on alternative civil service for conscientious objectors, and it fights for an end to the brutality in the treatment of

Former Yukos Head Mikhail Khodorkovsky is Led under Guard to Court

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, head of the Yukos oil company, was imprisoned when the Putin administration decided that he and his company had grown too independent.

Alexander Zemlianichenko/ AP Images

servicemen[44]) and a role as service provider. Much of its effort is spent on helping soldiers and their families deal with their problems.

Like many NGOs, the League of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers cultivates ties with counterpart organizations abroad, and it has won international recognition for its work. For some groups, such ties are a source of dependence, as organizations compensate for the lack of mass membership with aid and know-how from counterpart organizations abroad. However, the league enjoys a stable base of public support in Russia. Its international ties have also probably helped protect the group in the face of the sometimes hostile attitude of the authorities.

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia

The FITUR is the successor of the official trade-union federation under the Soviet regime. Unlike the RUIE, however, it has poorly adapted itself to the post-Communist environment, even though it inherited substantial organizational resources from the old Soviet trade-union organization. In the Soviet era, virtually every employed person belonged to a trade union. All branch and regional trade-union organizations were part of a single labor federation, called the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions. With the breakdown of the old regime, some of the member unions became independent, while other unions sprang up as independent bodies representing the interests of particular groups of workers. Nonetheless, the nucleus of the old official trade-union organization survived in the form of the FITUR. It remains by far the largest trade-union federation in Russia. Around 95 percent of all organized workers belong to unions that are, at least formally, members of the FITUR. The independent unions are much smaller. By comparison with big business, however, the labor movement is fragmented, weak, and unable to mobilize workers effectively for collective action. The workers of as many as half of all enterprises do not belong to any union at all.[45]

The FITUR inherited valuable real-estate assets from its Soviet-era predecessor organization, including thousands of office buildings and hotels. It also inherited the right to collect workers' contributions for the state social insurance fund. Control of this fund enabled the official trade unions to acquire enormous amounts of income-generating property over the years. These assets and income streams give leaders of the official unions considerable advantages in competing for members. But the FITUR no longer has centralized control over its regional and branch members. In the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, for instance, member unions formed their own political alliances

with parties. Thus, internal disunity is another major reason for the relative weakness of the FITUR as an organization. Much of its effort is expended in fighting independent unions to win a monopoly on representing workers in collective bargaining with employers, rather than in joining with other unions to defend the interests of workers generally.[46]

The ineffectiveness of the FITUR is also illustrated by the tepid response of organized labor to the severe deterioration in labor and social conditions in the 1990s. Unemployment rose to some 13 percent (very high, given that it was essentially unknown under the Communist regime), and even among employed workers, wage arrears were widespread. Surveys found that in any given year in the 1990s, three-quarters of all workers received their wages late at least once.[47] There were strikes, but far fewer than might have been expected, given how dire the economic situation was. Again, during the recession of 2008 and 2009, when unemployment rose to over 10 percent, there was very little protest. There were a small number of strikes, particularly at foreign-owned plants (where the authorities are more willing to allow workers to strike), but the numbers were very small: In all of 2008, there were only four officially registered strikes and only one in 2009.[48]

Why are unions so weak? One reason is that workers depend on the enterprises where they work for a variety of social benefits that are administered through the enterprise, such as housing, recreation facilities, and medical and childcare services.[49] Another, however, is the close relationship between the leadership of the FITUR and government authorities. Unwilling to forfeit the goodwill of those in power, trade union leaders are reluctant to mount protests against them. As a result, workers generally feel unrepresented by their unions.[50] While this situation would seem to favor the interests of business and the state, in fact, senior state leaders express frustration at how poorly organized the FITUR is; it means that neither business nor the state has a credible negotiating partner in dealing with issues concerning labor. As a result, the state fears the prospect that in a crisis, labor grievances could spread and become explosive, destabilizing the state.

New Sectors of Interest

In Russia, many new associations have formed around the interests of new categories of actors. Bankers, political consultants, realtors, judges, attorneys, auditors, and numerous other professional and occupational groups have formed associations to seek favorable policies or set professional standards. Environmental groups, women's organizations, human-rights activists, and many other cause-oriented groups have organized. Most of these operate in a particular locality, but a few have national scope. One of the most publicized movements is that of automobile owners, who have formed organizations in several cities to protest the abuse of privileges by VIPs (such as using flashing blue lights on top of their cars to cut through traffic jams).

The rules of the game for interest articulation changed sharply after the Soviet regime fell. There is much more open bargaining over the details of policy, although organizations need to operate within limits set by the authorities. Still, tens of thousands of nonstate associations compete to voice their interests through the mass media, the parliament, and the government. And in a variety of issue areas, public pressure and quiet lobbying articulated through interest groups does influence public policy.

PARTIES AND THE AGGREGATION OF INTERESTS

Interest aggregation refers to the process by which the demands of various groups of a society are pooled to form programmatic options for government. Although other institutions also aggregate interests, in most countries, political parties are the quintessential structure performing this vital task. How well parties aggregate interests, define choices for voters, and hold politicians accountable is of critical importance to democracy.

Although Russia's party system in the 1990s was fluid and fragmented, a clear structure has emerged in the 2000s, in which the United Russia party dominates while other parties are marginal. In the 1990s, there was considerable turnover in the parties from one election to the next. Voters had little sense of attachment to parties and more often associated them with particular politicians' personalities than with specific ideological stances. Most parties had very weak roots in society, although parties guided the work of the State Duma through their parliamentary factions.[51]

Russia's party system underwent a major transformation in the 2000s. The authorities have succeeded in creating a single party that dominates elections. Russians term such a party a **party of power**, indicating that the party serves the collective interests of those holding office. For them, it is a vehicle for career

advancement, while for the voters, it is the electoral face of the state. In the 1990s, there were several short-lived attempts to form parties of power, but in the 2000s, the United Russia party has become *the* unquestioned party of power. At the same time, the political authorities also exercise influence over other parties in varying degrees, determining what political role each may play. Parties that refuse to play by the regime's rules find it virtually impossible to operate. The president and government use United Russia and other parties to secure their control over the State Duma and regional legislatures, to channel political competition into safe outlets, and to manage the careers of ambitious politicians.

Elections and Party Development

Table 9.1 indicates the official results of the party-list voting in the 1993, 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2007 elections. The table groups parties into five categories that have characterized party identities since the early 1990s: *democratic* (those espousing liberal democratic

Party-List Vote in Duma Elections since 1993 TABLE 9.1

Support for United Russia has grown at the expense of support for democratic, Communist, and nationalist parties.

Party	1993	1995	1999	2003	2007
Democratic Parties					
Russia's Choice	15.5	3.9	—	—	—
Union of Rightist Forces (SPS)	—	—	8.5	4.0	0.9
Yabloko	7.8	6.8	5.9	4.3	1.5
Party of Russian Unity and Concord (PRES)	6.7	—	—	—	—
Democratic Party of Russia (DPR)	5.5	—	—	0.2	0.1
Centrist Parties					
Women of Russia	8.1	4.6	2.0	—	—
Civic Union[a]	1.9	1.6	—	—	—
Parties of Power					
Our Home Is Russia	—	10.1	1.2	—	—
Fatherland—All Russia (OVR)	—	—	13.3	—	—
Unity/United Russia[b]	—	—	23.3	38.2	64.3
A Just Russia	—	—	—	—	7.7
Nationalist Parties					
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)[c]	22.9	11.2	5.9	11.6	8.1
Congress of Russian Communities (KRO)[d]	—	4.3	0.6	—	—
Motherland (Rodina)	—	—	—	9.2	—
Leftist Parties					
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)	12.4	22.3	24.2	12.8	11.5
Agrarian Party	7.9	3.8	—	3.6	2.3
Other parties failing to meet 5% threshold	10.9	26.8	12.5	11.1	2.1
Against all[e]	4.3	2.8	3.3	4.7	—

[a]In 1995, the same alliance renamed itself the Bloc of Trade Unionists and Industrialists.

[b]In 2003, Unity changed its name to United Russia, following a merger with the Fatherland party.

[c]In 1999, the LDPR party list was called the Zhirinovsky bloc.

[d]In 1999, this party was called Congress of Russian Communities and Yuri Boldyrev Movement.

[e]In 2007, the "Against all" option was not available.

Source: Compiled by author from reports of Central Electoral Commission. See http://cikrf.ru.

principles); *leftist* (those advocating socialist and statist values); *centrist* (those mixing leftist and liberal democratic appeals); *nationalist* (those highlighting ethnic nationalism, patriotism, and imperialism); and *parties of power.*

Figure 9.6 shows how the election results translated into the distribution of seats in the Duma to various party factions following the 2003 and 2007 elections. Note how the spectrum of parliamentary parties has dwindled as United Russia has come to occupy a dominant position. It has been aided by some strategic engineering of the electoral system that has included tightening the rules for party registration, raising the threshold for representation from 5 percent to 7 percent, switching to an all-PR Duma, and prohibiting deputies from leaving their factions without losing their seats. Above all, the increasing use of electoral fraud to ensure overwhelming victories for United Russia has padded its margin. In the nearly twenty years since contested elections first were held, the party system has evolved from being one with many weakly supported parties to an authoritarian dominant party system.[52]

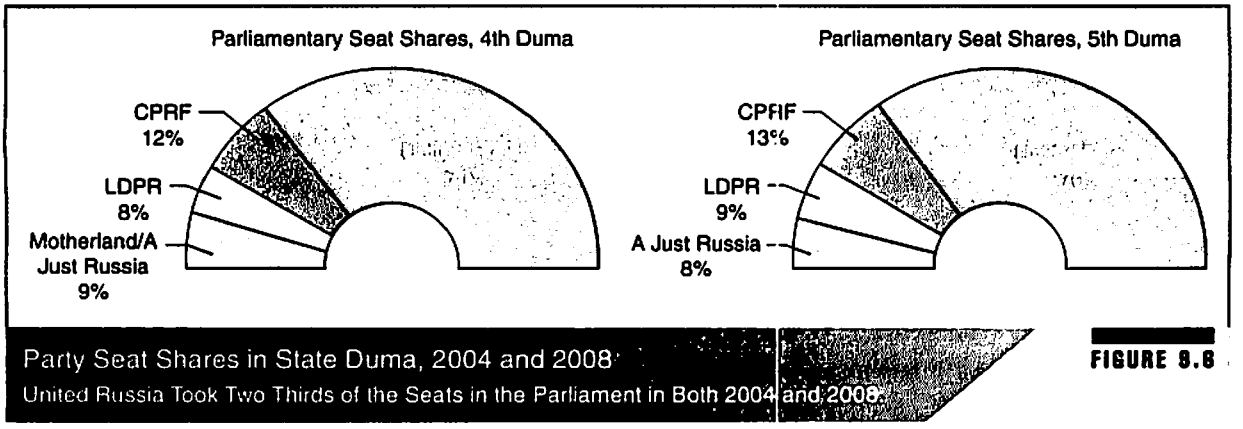
From the Multiparty System to the Dominant Party Regime

The multiparty system arose with the elections under Gorbachev to the reformed Soviet and Russian Republic parliaments. Democratically oriented politicians coalesced to defeat Communist Party officials in the 1989 and 1990 elections and, once elected, formed legislative caucuses in parliament. There they fought with Communist, nationalist, and agrarian groups. These parliamentary factions became the nuclei of political parties in the parliamentary election of December 1993.

Elections in the late 1980s and early 1990s were aligned around two poles: one associated with Yeltsin and the forces pushing for democracy and a market economy, and the other fighting to preserve the old system based on state ownership and control of the economy. Other parties positioned themselves in relation to these poles. For instance, Vladimir Zhirinovsky's nationalistic **Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)** claimed to offer an alternative to both the democrats and the Communists, appealing to xenophobia, authoritarianism, and the nostalgia for empire. The party's unexpectedly strong showing in the 1993 election was a signal of widespread popular discontent with the Yeltsin economic reforms.

The main anchor of the left (statist and socialist) pole of the spectrum has been the Communists (**Communist Party of the Russian Federation**, or **CPRF**), who are the heirs of the old ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union and who espouse a mixture of Communist and nationalist principles.

On the pro-market and pro-democracy side of the spectrum have been several parties whose fortunes have fallen dramatically since the 1990s. One of these is *Yabloko*. Yabloko has consistently defended



Party Seat Shares in State Duma, 2004 and 2008

United Russia Took Two Thirds of the Seats in the Parliament in Both 2004 and 2008

FIGURE 9.6

Notes: Figures taken as of May 2004 and January 2008. Percentages shift with time as members change factional affiliations. Note that United Russia was the result of a merger of the Fatherland Party and Unity and that A Just Russia formed in 2006 from the merger of Motherland, the Pensioners' Party, and the Party of Life.

Source: Compiled by author from reports of State Duma.

democratic principles and a social democratic policy in the economy, and has opposed some of the policies pursued by Yeltsin and Putin that have sought to dismantle most of the old state supports and controls in the economy. It is no longer represented in the Duma because it has failed to attract enough votes to clear the 7-percent threshold.

Elections in the early to mid-1990s reflected the polarization between democrats and Communists, but also tended to produce a fragmented field of parties. In the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections, neither pro-democracy parties nor Communists won a clear majority, although democrats were in the minority, while Communists, nationalists, and their allies had a majority of seats. Except for a few parties (the CPRF, the LDPR, and Yabloko), most parties had shallow roots and tended to spring up shortly before elections. Many sought to avoid taking a clear programmatic stance, instead claiming to be "centrists" and pragmatists who would steer between the opposing poles of the democrats and Communists.

Presidential elections have not tended to stimulate party development as much as parliamentary elections have because they have revolved more around the personalities of the candidates. When Boris Yeltsin ran for reelection in 1996, he started out with an approval rating in the single digits (and even considered canceling the election at one point), but he ultimately rallied his strength and succeeded in persuading voters that the election was about a choice between him and a return to Communism. Yeltsin's displays of vigor during the campaign, his lavish promises to voters, and his domination of the media all contributed to a surge in popularity and a victory over Gennadii Ziuganov, his Communist rival (see Table 9.2).[53] The campaign took its toll on Yeltsin, however. Soon afterward he had major heart surgery, and for much of his second term, he was in poor health.

TABLE 9.2

Presidential Election, 1996

Yeltsin edged out the Communist candidate in the first round and then won decisively in the second round.

	First Round (June 16, 1996) (%)	Second Round (July 3, 1996) (%)
Boris Yeltsin	35.2	53.8
Gennadii Ziuganov	32.0	40.3
Alexander Lebed'	14.5	—
Grigorii Yavlinskii	7.3	—
Vladimir Zhirinovsky	5.7	—
Svyatoslav Fedorov	0.9	—
Mikhail Gorbachev	0.5	—
Martin Shakkum	0.3	—
Yurii Vlasov	0.2	—
Vladimir Bryntsalov	0.1	—
Aman Tuleev	0.0	—
Against all candidates	1.5	4.8

The 1999 election was dominated by the question of who would succeed Yeltsin as president. Many federal and regional officeholders wanted to rally around a new "party of power" in order to protect their jobs. A group of backroom Kremlin strategists formed a movement called Unity in the late summer of 1999. They wanted to create an electoral bloc that state officials throughout the country could rally around in the race for the Duma. They also intended it to serve as a political vehicle for Vladimir Putin, whom Yeltsin had just named prime minister and anointed as his successor. Conveniently for Putin, within days of Unity's formation and Putin's appointment, Chechen rebels launched raids into the neighboring region of Dagestan. Bombings of apartment buildings—officially blamed on Chechen terrorists—also occurred in Moscow and other cities. Putin's decisive handling of the military operations against the Chechen guerrillas gave him and the Unity movement a major boost in popularity. Unity, which had not even existed until late August, won 23 percent of the party-list vote in December.

The presidential election of 2000 occurred ahead of schedule due to President Yeltsin's early resignation. Under the constitution, the prime minister automatically succeeds the president if the president leaves office early, but new elections must be held within three months. Accordingly, the presidential election was scheduled for March 26, 2000. The early election gave the front-runner and incumbent, Putin, an advantage because he could capitalize on his popularity and the country's desire for continuity. Putin ran the Russian equivalent of a "rose garden" campaign, preferring to be seen handling the normal daily business of a president, rather than going out on the hustings and asking for people's votes. He counted on

Russian Presidential Elections in the 2000s
Putin and Medvedev won in the first round by wide margins in each race.

TABLE 9.8

	2000	2004	2008
Vladimir Putin	52.9	71.3	—
Gennadii Ziuganov (CPRF)	29.2	—	17.7
Vladimir Zhirinovsky (LDPR)	2.7	—	9.3
Grigorii Yavlinskii (Yabloko)	5.8	—	—
Nikolai Kharitonov (CPRF)	—	13.7	—
Dmitrii Medvedev	—	—	70.2
Andrei Bogdanov (DPR)	—	—	1.3
Other	6.5	10.7	—
Against all candidates	1.8	3.4	—

Legend: CPRF: Communist Party of the Russian Federation; LDPR: Liberal Democratic Party of Russia; DPR: Democratic Party of Russia

Note: The "Against all candidates" option was not available on the 2008 ballot.

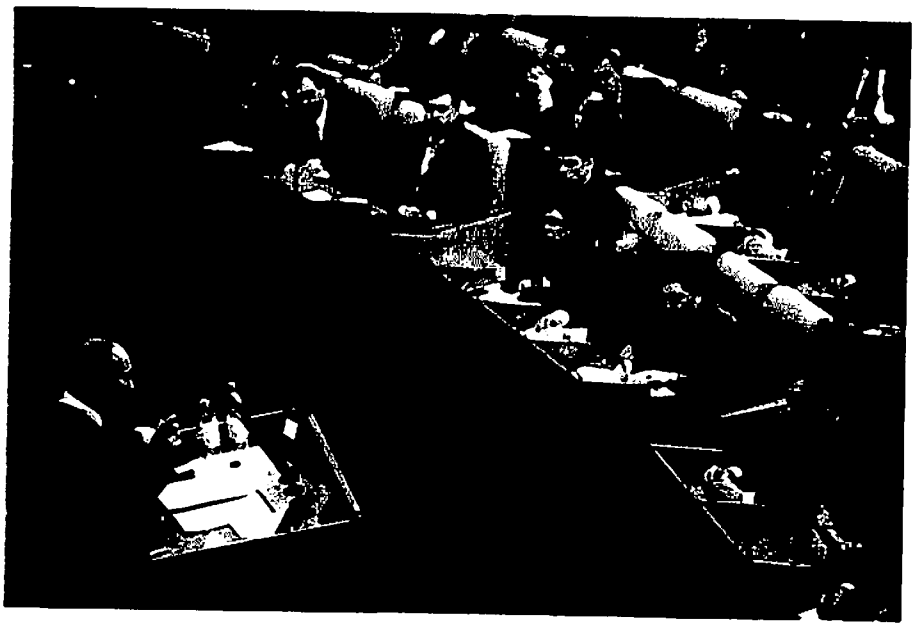
the support of officeholders at all levels, a media campaign that presented a "presidential" image to the voters, and the voters' fear that change would only make life worse. His rivals, moreover, were weak. Several prominent politicians prudently chose not to run against him. Putin's strategy worked brilliantly: He won an outright majority in the first round (see Table 9.3).

The 2003 and 2004 Elections Under Putin, the ideological divide between Communists and democrats that had marked the transition era disappeared. The political arena was dominated by the president and his supporters. The loyal pro-Putin party, Unity, was renamed United Russia after it absorbed a rival party, Fatherland (headed by Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov). United Russia soon acquired a near-monopoly in the party spectrum, squeezing other parties to the margins. A series of changes in the electoral law made it increasingly difficult for all but a few parties to compete in elections, while the regime mounted a major effort to pressure regional governors and big business to back United Russia.

The Kremlin's success in making United Russia the dominant party was demonstrated vividly in the 2003 parliamentary election. United Russia won 38 percent of the party-list vote and wound up with two-thirds of the seats in the Duma. The Communists suffered a severe blow, losing almost half their vote share, and the democrats did even worse. For the first time, none of the democratic parties won seats on the party-list vote. The result underscored Putin's drive to eliminate any meaningful political opposition. Such an impressive showing for United Russia assured Putin's reelection as president. The March 2004 race was a landslide. Putin won easily with 71.3 percent of the vote, while his Communist rival received less than 14 percent of the vote (see again Table 9.3). European observers commented that the elections were "well administered" but hardly constituted "a genuine democratic contest," in view of the president's overwhelming control of media coverage of the race and the absence of genuine competition.[54]

United Russia's dominance was confirmed in the 2007 Duma election. Shortly before the election, Putin declared that he would head the party's list (though he said he would not join the party and he did not intend to take his Duma seat).[55] This indicated that Putin intended to use the party as a basis for his power even after he left the presidency. Even though the presidential administration created a second party of power (called A Just Russia) as a mechanism to siphon off some votes on the left side of the spectrum and to offer an alternative outlet for some politicians who could not be accommodated in United Russia, United Russia's overwhelming success was never in doubt, and it went on to win 64.3 percent of the vote. The authorities used a variety of methods to manipulate the election, ranging from grossly unequal access to the media for the parties to outright falsification of results in many regions (in some districts, the reported vote for United Russia was greater than 100 percent of the registered voters).[56]

Similarly, the authorities took no chances in the 2008 presidential election. Again, they violated numerous provisions of the law in order to guarantee the desired outcome—for example, by disqualifying potentially serious opposition candidates, pouring large resources from the state budget into Medvedev's campaign, giving Medvedev disproportionate media coverage, and ignoring challenges brought by opposition groups and election-rights NGOs over violations of the election law. Medvedev would probably have won in any case, but the large-scale manipulation of the election signaled to voters and opponents alike that the authorities were in complete control of the succession. The authorities managed the outcome so successfully that Medvedev officially won over 70 percent



Vladimir Putin Addresses the State Duma

Recent elections to the Duma have been manipulated by Russian authorities in order to eliminate meaningful political opposition.

Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP/Getty Images

of the vote—about 1 percentage point below Putin's reported margin in 2004 (see again Table 9.3).

The establishment of the dominant party regime has changed the way parties represent different social groups. In the 1990s, there were some systematic links between particular social groups and particular parties. For instance, younger and better-educated voters tended to support the democratic parties, while older and less-educated voters supported Communist and nationalist parties. But as the United Russia party has gained dominance, it has appealed to all parts of the society. As a result, social structure has become less and less significant as an influence on voting, while voters' attitudes toward the authorities in general and toward Putin in particular have become the most important predictor of voting preferences.

Table 9.4 indicates that United Russia draws its support broadly from all parts of society, although it draws more support from women than from men and from among older voters than youth. It is strongly identified in the public mind with Putin (note that 21 percent of those who do not have confidence in Putin voted for the Communists). The challenge for United Russia in the future will be to establish a basis of support that goes beyond simply its identification with Putin. Putin and other officials have warned the party that it cannot hope to stay on the Kremlin's life-support system forever—though they are unwilling to cut it loose.

For other parties, the 2007 and 2008 elections confirmed the new reality that United Russia is likely to enjoy a dominant position for years to come. Other parties have been relegated to playing a small, marginal role in national politics and concentrating their efforts on winning seats in regional parliaments.

THE POLITICS OF ECONOMIC REFORM

The Dual Transition

Russia's post-Communist transition was wrenching because the country had to remake both its *political* and its *economic* institutions following the end of Communism. The move to a market economy created opportunities for some—and hardships for many more. Democratization opened the political system to the influence of groups that could organize to press for exclusive economic benefits for themselves. Many people who had modest but secure livelihoods under the Soviet regime were ruined by inflation and unemployment when the planned economy broke down. A smaller number took advantage of opportunities for entrepreneurship or exploited their connections with government to amass sizeable fortunes. One reason Vladimir Putin was so popular was that people gave him credit for restoring growth and prosperity to the economy and cracking down on some of the tycoons who had amassed great fortunes by dubious means.

TABLE 8.4

Social Support for Parliamentary Parties, Duma Elections, 2007

United Russia draws evenly from most sections of the population, but its support from women is substantially stronger than from among men

	Total sample	UR	CPRF	SR	LDPR	APR	SPS	Yabloko	Other party or cast invalid ballot	Hard to say, do not remember	Did not vote
As share of sample	100	41	7	5	5	1	1	1	0	4	39
Sex:											
Male	46	33	8	3	7	1	1	1	0	4	46
Female	54	48	6	6	3	1	1	0	0	3	35
Age:											
18–35 years old	37	36	2	2	7	1	0	0	0	3	52
36–54 years old	36	40	7	6	4	1	1	1	0	4	40
55 or older	28	49	13	8	2	1	1	1	1	4	24
Education:											
Less than secondary education	12	50	7	4	3	1	0	0	0	2	35
Complete secondary education	35	38	6	4	6	1	0	0	0	4	45
Specialized secondary education	35	41	6	5	4	1	1	1	0	4	41
Higher education	18	40	9	7	5	1	1	2	1	4	34
Income:											
Less than 2,500 rubles/month	16	44	7	4	6	0	0	0	1	3	38
2,501–4,500 rubles	29	48	8	6	4	1	0	0	0	4	33
Greater than 4,500 rubles	26	39	6	5	4	1	1	1	2	2	41
Residence:											
Moscow	8	28	7	6	3	1	3	2	0	4	50
Other megapolis	12	38	6	7	5	1	0	1	0	1	42
Large city	16	36	6	6	5	1	0	0	0	3	46
Small city	38	41	7	4	5	1	1	0	0	4	41
Village	26	49	7	4	4	1	0	0	0	4	35
Trust Putin:											
Fully	68	51	4	4	3	1	0	0	0	3	37
Partly	21	23	12	7	8	0	1	1	1	5	47
Do not trust	8	3	21	5	10	2	2	2	2	3	53

Note: Read figures across rows. For instance, men comprised 46% of the sample. 33% of men voted for United Russia; 8% voted for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation; 46% did not vote.

Legend:
UR: United Russia
CPRF: Communist Party of the Russian Federation
SR: A Just Russia
LDPR: Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
APR: Agrarian Party of Russia
SPS: League of Right Forces

Source: Figures taken from Web site of Fond "Obshchestvennogo mneniia." Published December 13, 2010. Survey conducted immediately after Duma election, $n = 1,500$.

http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d074922.
Accessed June 29, 2010.

Stabilization Russia pursued two major sets of economic reforms in the early 1990s: macroeconomic stabilization and privatization. Stabilization, which in Russia came to be called **shock therapy**, is a program intended to stop a country's financial meltdown. This required a painful dose of fiscal and monetary discipline by slashing government spending and squeezing the money supply. Structural reform of this kind always lowers the standard of living for some groups of the population in the short run.

Initially, many expected that the greatest enemies of stabilization would be persons whose living standards suffered as a result of the higher prices and lower incomes, such as pensioners and workers in state enterprises. In practice, however, those who benefited from the early steps to open the economy and privatize state assets proved to be the greatest obstacles to further reform because they exploited their privileged access to the authorities to lock in their own gains and to oppose any subsequent measures to expand competition. Among these were officials who acquired ownership rights to monopoly enterprises and then worked to shut out potential competitors from their markets, state officials who benefited from collecting "fees" to issue licenses to importers and exporters or permits for doing business, and entrepreneurs whose firms dominated the market in their industry.[57] A fully competitive market system, with a level playing field for all players, would have posed a threat to their ability to profit from their privileged positions.

From Communism to Capitalism Communist systems differed from other authoritarian regimes in ways that made their economic transitions more difficult. This was particularly true for the Soviet Union and its successor states. For one, the economic growth model followed by Stalin and his successors concentrated much production in large enterprises. This meant that many local governments were entirely dependent on the economic health of a single employer. The heavy commitment of resources to military production in the Soviet Union further complicated the task of reform in Russia, as does the country's vast size. Rebuilding the decaying infrastructure of a country as large as Russia is staggeringly expensive.

The economic stabilization program began on January 2, 1992, when the government abolished most controls on prices, raised taxes, and cut government spending sharply. Almost immediately, opposition to the new program began to form. Economists and politicians took sides. The shock-therapy program was an easy target for criticism, even though there was no consensus among critics about what the alternative should be. It became commonplace to say that the program was "all shock and no therapy."

By cutting government spending, letting prices rise, and raising taxes, the stabilization program sought to create incentives for producers to increase output and find new niches in the marketplaces. But Russian producers did not initially respond by raising productivity. As a result, society suffered from a sharp, sudden loss in purchasing power. People went hungry, bank savings vanished, and the economy fell into a protracted slump. Firms that were politically connected were able to survive by winning cheap credits and production orders from the government, which dampened any incentive for improving productivity. Desperate to raise operating revenues, the government borrowed heavily from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and issued treasury bonds at ruinously high interest rates. IMF loans came with strings attached—the government pledged to cut spending further and step up tax collections as a condition of accepting IMF assistance, which fueled the depression further. Communists and nationalists got a rise out of audiences by depicting the government as the puppet of a malevolent, imperialist West.

Privatization Stabilization was followed shortly afterward by the mass **privatization** of state firms. In contrast to the shock-therapy program, privatization enjoyed considerable public support, at least at first. Privatization transfers legal title of state firms to private owners. Under the right conditions, private ownership of productive assets is usually more efficient for society as a whole than is state ownership because in a competitive environment, owners are motivated by an incentive to maximize their property's ability to produce a return. Under the privatization program, every Russian citizen received a voucher with a face value of 10,000 rubles (around $30 at the time). People were free to buy and sell vouchers, but they could be used only to acquire shares of stock in privatized enterprises or shares of mutual funds investing in privatized enterprises. The program sought to ensure that everyone became a property owner instantly. Politically, the program aimed to build support for the economic reforms by giving citizens a stake in the outcome of the

market transition. Economically, the government hoped that privatization would eventually spur increases in productivity by creating meaningful property rights. Beginning in October 1992, the program distributed 148 million privatization vouchers to citizens. By June 30, 1994, when the program ended, 140 million vouchers had been exchanged for stock out of the 148 million originally distributed. Some 40 million citizens were, in theory, share owners. But these shares were often of no value because they paid no dividends and shareholders exercised no voting rights in the companies.

The next phase of privatization auctioned off most remaining shares of state enterprises for cash. This phase was marked by a series of scandalous sweetheart deals in which banks owned by a small number of Russia's wealthiest tycoons wound up with title to some of Russia's most lucrative oil, gas, and metallurgy firms for bargain-basement prices. The most notorious of these arrangements became known as the **loans for shares** scheme. It was devised in 1995 by a small group of business magnates with strong connections to government, who persuaded Yeltsin to auction off management rights to controlling packages of shares in several major state-owned companies in return for loans to the government. If the government failed to repay the loans in a year's time, the shares would revert to the banks that made the loans. The government, as expected, defaulted on the loans, letting a small number of oligarchs acquire ownership of some of Russia's most valuable companies.[58]

Consequences of Privatization On paper, privatization was a huge success. By 1996, privatized firms produced about 90 percent of industrial output, and about two-thirds of all large and medium-sized enterprises had been privatized.[59] In fact, however, the actual transfer of ownership rights was far less impressive than it appeared. For one thing, the dominant pattern was for managers to acquire large shareholdings of the firms they ran. As a result, management of many firms did not change. Moreover, many nominally private firms continued to be closely tied to state support, such as cheap state-subsidized loans and credits.[60]

The program allowed a great many unscrupulous wheeler-dealers to prey on the public through a variety of financial schemes. Some investment funds promised truly incredible rates of return. Many people lost their savings by investing in funds that went bankrupt or turned out to be simple pyramid schemes. The Russian government lacked the capacity to protect the investors. Privatization was carried out before the institutional framework of a market economy was in place. Markets for stocks, bonds, and commodities were small in scale and weakly regulated. The legal foundation for a market economy has gradually emerged, but only after much of the economy was already privatized. For much of the 1990s, the lack of liquidity in the economy meant that enterprises failed to pay their wages and taxes on time, trading with one another using barter.

The government fell into an unsustainable debt trap. Unable to meet its obligations, it grew increasingly dependent on loans. As lenders became ever more certain that the government could not make good on its obligations, they demanded ever higher interest rates, deepening the trap. Ultimately, the bubble burst. In August 1998, the government declared a moratorium on its debts and let the ruble's value collapse against the dollar. Overnight, the ruble lost two-thirds of its value and credit dried up.[61] The government bonds held by investors were almost worthless. The effects of the crash rippled through the economy. The sharp devaluation of the ruble made exports more competitive and gave an impetus to domestic producers, but also significantly lowered people's living standards.

As Table 9.5 shows, economic output in Russia fell for a decade before beginning to recover in 1999. The recovery was not due to a structural reform of the economy. There has not been a substantial overhaul of the banking system or of the way industry is managed. As a result, the economy was particularly vulnerable to a worldwide financial and economic crisis because it remained dependent on exports of natural resources: Oil and gas make up a quarter of Russian GDP. The rise in the world prices for oil and gas in the 2000s and the sharp drop in the value of the ruble brought a decade of steady growth from 1999 to 2008. As the economy revived, enterprises were able to pay off arrears in back wages and taxes. In turn, these taxes allowed government to meet its own obligations, thereby allowing consumer demand for industry's products to rise, and so on. Living standards rose for all sections of the population and in most parts of the country.

The leaders have expressed satisfaction with the favorable trends in the economy, but warn that they

Russian Annual GDP Growth and Price Inflation Rates, 1991–2009 **TABLE 9.5**

Russia enjoyed sustained growth for most of the 2000s, after a dismal decade in the 1990s, but 2009 saw a sharp contraction.

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
GDP	−5	−14.5	−8.7	−12.6	−4.3	−6	0.4	−11.6	3.2	7.6	5	4	7.3	7.1	6.4	7.4	8.1	5.6	−7.9
Inflation	138	2323	844	202	131	21.8	11	84.4	36.5	20.2	18.6	15.1	12	11.7	10.9	9	11.9	13.3	8.8

Note: GDP is measured in constant market prices. Inflation is measured as the percentage change in the consumer price index from December of one year to December of the next.

Source: Press reports of Russian State Statistical Service (www.gks.ru).

are not sufficient to achieve sustained and balanced development. Both Putin and Medvedev have called for reducing the economy's reliance on natural resource exports and increasing its capacity for innovation. Medvedev has called for a large-scale program of modernization of the economy, one feature of which is a massive state-funded effort to create a Russian version of "Silicon Valley" outside Moscow—a city devoted to high-tech research and development and innovative start-up firms. He has attempted to interest Russian and international investors in the project. Whether it will have the intended transformative effect on the economy remains to be seen.

Social Conditions Living standards fell sharply during the 1990s. A small minority became wealthy, and some households improved their lot modestly. Most people, however, suffered a net decline in living standards as a result of unemployment, lagging income, and nonpayment of wages and pensions.

Income inequality grew sharply both during the period of economic decline in the 1990s and again during the period of economic recovery in the 2000s. This has been caused by many factors. In the 1990s, it was the result of the lag of wage increases behind price inflation, the sharp rise in unemployment, the deterioration of the pension and other social assistance systems, and the concentration of vast wealth in the hands of a small number of people. In the 2000s, poverty has decreased significantly, along with unemployment, and pension levels have risen. Yet inequality continues to rise as a result of large disparities in wage levels (two workers in the same occupation and in the same region might have widely different wages, depending on where they work); the extremely high earnings of managers in industries such as energy and finance; and the Putin regime's shift to a flat (13-percent) income tax and abolition of estate taxes. As a result of both government policy and current economic trends, therefore, economic prosperity is benefiting those at the upper end of the income distribution much more than it is those at the lower end. This helps explain the sharp rise in the number of Russian billionaires. According to *Forbes* magazine's list, the number of billionaires in Russia shot up from 60 to 110 between 2007 and 2008.[62] But the financial crisis hit them hard; on average, they lost something like half their wealth in the 2008 financial crash.[63]

One commonly used measure of inequality is the Gini index, which is an aggregate measure of the total deviation from perfect equality in the distribution of wealth or income. In Russia, the Gini index nearly doubled during the early 1990s, rising from 26 in 1987 through 1990 to 48 in 1993 and 1994. Inequality in Russia was higher than in any other post-Communist country except for Kyrgyzstan.[64] As the economy began to recover and poverty fell, the Gini index declined slightly, to just under 40, before creeping back up in the late 2000s to over 42 (close to the level of income inequality in the United States). In 2009, the richest tenth of the population in Russia received over sixteen times as much income as did the poorest tenth, up from fourteen times in 2002. The actual level of income inequality is probably considerably greater than the official figure because of the large scale of unreported, "off-book" income due to tax evasion.

The continuing rise in inequality and the absence of a growing middle class constitute a matter of some concern to Russian leaders. In his address to the State Council on February 8, 2008, President Putin declared that the current level of income inequality was "absolutely unacceptable" and should be reduced to more moderate levels; he called for measures that would bring about an expansion of the middle class.

Its share of the population, he declared, should reach 60 or even 70 percent by 2020.[65]

An especially disturbing dimension of the social effects of transition has been the erosion of public health. Although public health had deteriorated in the late Communist period, the decline worsened after the regime changed. Mortality rates have risen sharply, especially among males. Life expectancy for males in Russia is at a level comparable to that in poor and developing countries. At present, life expectancy at birth for males is just over sixty-two years and for females seventy-four years. The disparity between male and female mortality is generally attributed to the higher rates of abuse of alcohol and tobacco among men. Other demographic indicators are equally grim. Prime Minister Fradkov told a Cabinet meeting in July 2006 that only 30 percent of newborn children "can be described as healthy" and that "there are more than 500,000 disabled children in need of various forms of treatment, and also some 730,000 orphans or abandoned children."[66] Rates of incidence of HIV and other infectious diseases, murders, suicides, drug addiction, and alcoholism are rising.

Russia's leaders consider the demographic crisis to pose a grave threat to the country's national security, both because of the growing shortage of labor in some regions (experts believe that there are 8 to 10 million illegal immigrants in Russia) and because of the army's inability to recruit enough healthy young men. On average, each year Russia's population declines by about three-quarters of a million people due to the excess of deaths over births. Demographers estimate that Russia's population could fall by over one-third by 2050. In his 2006 message to parliament, President Putin called for a series of measures to raise birthrates, reduce mortality, and stimulate immigration.

Setting the country on a path of self-sustaining economic growth, where workers and investors are confident in their legal rights, requires a complete overhaul of the relationship of the state to the economy. The Soviet state used central planning to direct enterprises on what to produce and how to use resources. Much of the economy was geared to heavy industry and defense production, and government ministries directly administered each branch of the economy. The post-Communist state must have an entirely different relationship to the economy in order to stimulate growth. It must set clear rules for economic activity, regulate markets, enforce the law, supply public goods and services, and promote competition. Shifting the structure of the state bureaucracy and the attitudes of state officials has been a Herculean task.

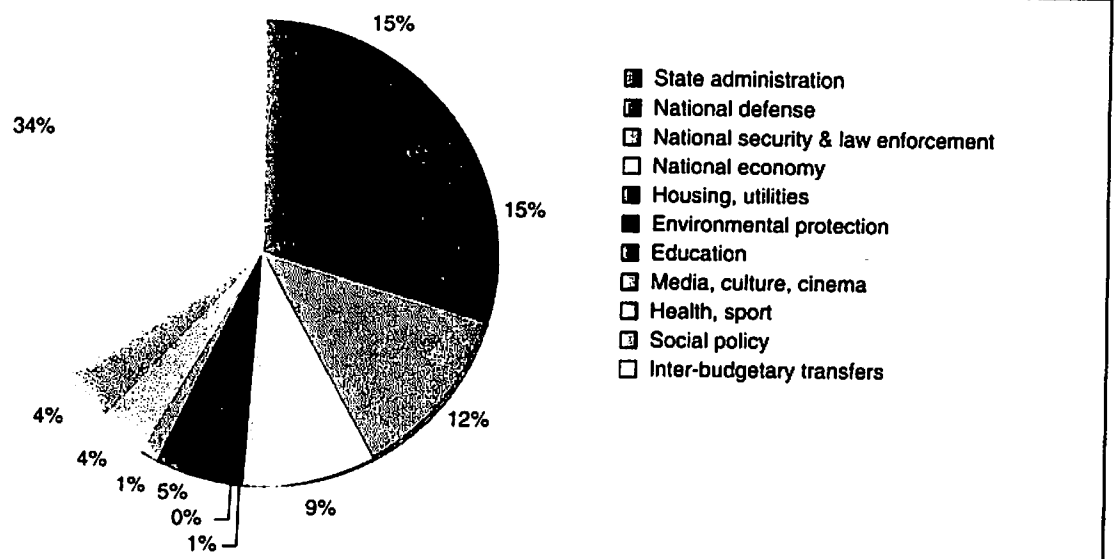
We can get some idea of the legacy of the Communist system in the way the state was intertwined with the economy by looking at the structure of the state budget. Figure 9.7 shows the breakdown of spending for the 2010 federal budget. Total spending was set at 8.8 trillion rubles, or about $282 billion. The share spent on national defense (at 8 percent) probably understates the actual amount, although it is equaled by spending on national security and law enforcement. The shares of spending on general administration (12 percent) and subsidies to various federal and regional funds (42 percent) are high, compared with other countries, and indicate how substantial the central government's role is in state and society. The share of spending on social welfare—most of which goes for pensions—at 3.7 percent is low by comparative standards.

The government also recognizes that the oil- and gas-fueled budget surpluses pose a serious danger of creating inflationary pressures in the economy. For this reason, like some other oil-rich states, Russia has created a "stabilization fund" that removes some of the revenues generated by high world energy prices from circulation and uses them to pay off external debt. In 2007, the government divided the stabilization fund into two portions, one called the *reserve fund*, to be used in the event of a serious fall in government revenues, and the other called a *national welfare fund*, to be used mainly to shore up the pension system. These funds became crucial in enabling Russia's government to cover its deficits as its revenues dropped and its social-spending obligations rose when the 2008 financial crisis struck. The government drew down both heavily in order to increase spending on pensions and unemployment benefits.

TOWARD THE RULE OF LAW?

The Law-Governed State

One of the most important goals of Gorbachev's reforms was to make the Soviet Union a **law-governed state (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*)**, rather than one in which state bodies and the Communist Party exercised power arbitrarily. Since 1991, the Russian leaders have asserted that the state must respect the primacy of law over politics—even when they took actions grossly violating the constitution. The difficulty in placing law above politics



2010 Russian Federal Budget

Over half the budget goes to state administration and transfers to other levels of government.

FIGURE 8.7

Source: Russian Ministry of Finance, www.minfin.ru.

testifies to the lingering legacy of the old regime's abuse of the legal system. Presidents Putin and Medvedev have repeatedly declared their commitment to the principle of the rule of law, even when their actions have flagrantly infringed on the independence of the judiciary.

The struggle for the rule of law began well before Gorbachev. After Stalin died, his successors ended mass terror and took significant steps to reduce the use of law for political repression. Still, throughout the late Soviet era, the Communist Party and the KGB often used legal procedures to give the mantle of legal legitimacy to acts of political repression. Although the prosecution of political dissidents has ended, the use of the legal system for political purposes by state authorities continues. Reforms in the 1990s took some steps toward making the judiciary independent of the authorities, but in the 2000s, political control over the legal system has increased.

Obstacles to the Rule of Law

Movement toward the rule of law continues to be hampered by the abuse of legal institutions by the political authorities and by endemic corruption in state and society.

In the post-Soviet state, the security police continue to operate autonomously. In the Soviet period, the agency with principal responsibility for maintaining domestic security was the KGB (State Security Committee). The KGB exercised wide powers, including responsibility for both domestic and foreign intelligence. Since 1991, its functions have been split up among several agencies. The main domestic security agency is the FSB. Although the structure and mission of the security agencies have changed, they have never undergone a thorough purge of personnel. No member of or collaborator with the Soviet-era security services has been prosecuted for violating citizens' rights. There has been no review of officials' records for past collaboration with the secret police. This is one of several ways in which post-Soviet Russia has still not put its Communist past behind it.

The security police are regarded as one of the more professionally competent and uncorrupted state agencies. However, despite being assigned new tasks, such as fighting international narcotics trafficking and terrorism, they still demonstrate a Soviet-style preoccupation with policing the country's political life. For example, they have proposed legislation giving them broad powers to shut down Internet providers and

media outlets for publishing "extremist" content. Many Soviet-era police practices have been revived.

President Putin also resumed the Soviet-era practice of using the legal system to suppress potential political opposition. An example is the series of legal maneuvers taken against the owners of independent media in the early 2000s. These included police harassment and criminal prosecution, as well as civil actions such as bankruptcy proceedings. For example, the owners of two television companies were forced to divest themselves of their media holdings and transfer ownership to companies loyal to the administration. As a result, Russia's two relatively autonomous national television companies lost their political independence, one respected liberal newspaper was shut down, and the entire media establishment was sent a strong signal that it would be wise to avoid crossing the current administration. Today, only a small number of print media have retained a measure of political independence.[67]

In the 1990s, the bankruptcy laws were often used by businesses to drive rivals into bankruptcy in order to take them over; today, state companies use civil and criminal laws for the same purpose—to force a private company to sell out at a bargain price so that it can then be taken over and its assets stripped. These forced hostile takeovers are called *reiderstvo* (raiding).

Corruption Another obstacle to the rule of law is endemic corruption. Corruption increased substantially after the Soviet period. It is widespread both in everyday life and in dealings with the state. A survey in May 2010 found that 55 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that "everyone who deals with officials gives bribes," although 79 percent of the respondents had not paid a bribe themselves in the last twelve months.[68] Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Russia 146th out of 190 countries in the pervasiveness of corruption (1st means the least corrupt country; 190th is the most corrupt). Experts estimate that the total volume of corrupt transactions in the economy exceeds the total value of the state budget.[69] Law-enforcement (especially the traffic police), health-care, education, and government-registration offices are considered the worst offenders.

President Medvedev has declared fighting corruption to be a top priority of his administration, forcing officials to publish declarations of their income and property. So far, however, most observers believe that his drive has had little effect in reducing corruption.

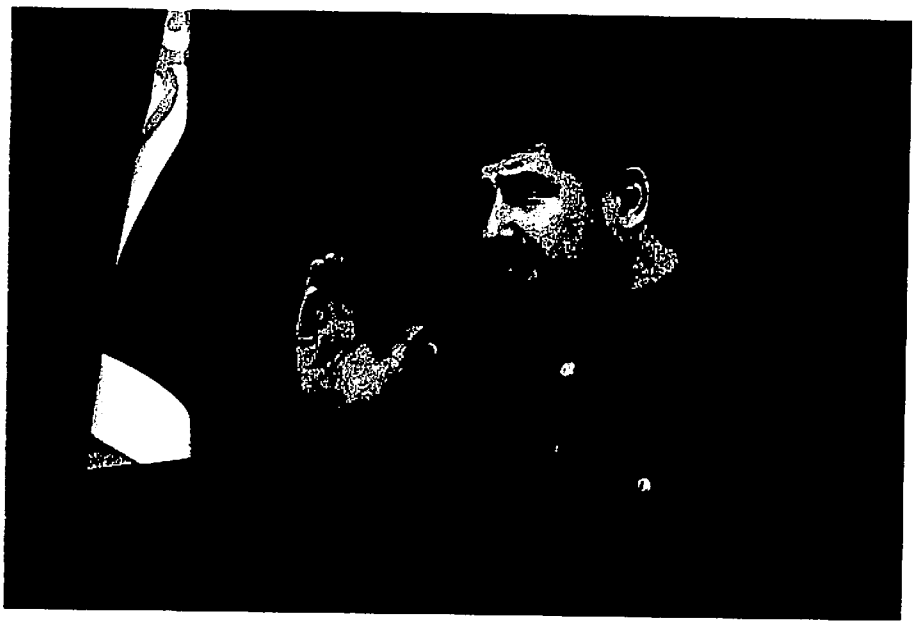
Corruption is hardly unique to Russia or to the former Communist world. However, it is especially widespread in Russia and the other former Soviet states. Corruption on this scale imposes a severe drag on economic development, both because it diverts resources away from public needs and because it undermines people's willingness to invest in productive activity.[70] Moreover, much corruption is tied to organized crime, which bribes government officials for protection and drives out legal businesses. The corruption of the police and courts ensures that many crimes go unpunished and forces legal businesses to compete in the corruption market with illegal ones.

Corruption in Russia has deep roots, and many Russians assume that it is ineradicable. Comparative studies of corruption demonstrate, however, that a culture of corruption can be changed by changing the expectations of the public and the government.[71] The key is for the political leadership to make a serious effort to combat corruption and to back up this commitment with institutional reform and sustained attention to the problem.

Since the early 1990s, there have been a number of reforms, such as the adoption of trial by jury and the creation of the Constitutional Court, that have the potential to strengthen the judiciary's independence from both political pressure and corruption. However, the authorities' habitual use of the procuracy and the courts for political purposes and the powerfully corrosive effect of corruption continue to subvert the integrity of the legal system. In the long run, movement toward the rule of law will require that power be sufficiently dispersed among groups and organizations in the state and society so that neither private nor state interests are powerful enough to subordinate the law to their own purposes.

RUSSIA AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Russia's thousand-year history of expansion, war, and state domination of society has left behind a legacy of autocratic rule and a preoccupation with defending national borders. The collapse of the Soviet regime required Russia to rebuild its political institutions, economic system, national identity, and relations with the



Chechnia's Leader Kadyrov Giving an Address

Ramzan Kadyrov, president of Chechnia, has been credited for bringing some stability to the region but has also been accused of human-rights violations.

RIA Novosti/TopFoto/The Image Works

outside world. During the Soviet period, state propaganda used the image of an international struggle between capitalism and socialism to justify its repressive control over society and its enormous military establishment. Now the country's leaders recognize that only through strong ties with the world economy can Russia hope to prosper. Yet they also want to maintain strong controls over the political system in order to preserve stability and prevent threats to their power.

Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev all asserted that the integration of Russia into the community of developed democracies is strategically important for Russia. Gorbachev was willing to allow Communist regimes to fall throughout Eastern Europe for the sake of improved relations with the West. Yeltsin accepted the admission of East European states into NATO as a necessary condition for close relations with the United States and Europe. Putin repeatedly emphasized that he regarded Russia's admission to the WTO as critical for Russia's long-term economic success. Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Putin immediately telephoned U.S. president George W. Bush to offer his support. Putin clearly saw an advantage for Russia in aligning itself with the United States against Islamic terrorism, which it identified as an immediate threat to its own security. Putin cited Russia's own war in Chechnia as part of the global struggle against Islamist terrorists.

At the same time, Russia has not accepted the constraints of international law. It has expanded its military presence in several former Soviet republics, pressuring them to become satellites of Russia. In August 2008, it launched a well-prepared military invasion of independent, pro-Western Georgia after Georgia attempted to use force to take back control over a Russia-backed breakaway region, South Ossetia. The overwhelming Russian response was clearly intended to subjugate Georgia to Russia's interest in preserving a buffer of subordinate states in the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Likewise, in its brutal military campaigns in Chechnia from 1994 to 1996 and then again from 1999 to 2006, Russia refused to allow international human-rights organizations to monitor Russian practices, which included mass bombardment of civilian areas. In 2007, Russia resumed the Cold War–era practice of sending its strategic bombers on long-distance missions over the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic oceans to demonstrate the global reach of its military power. As its economic and military power has revived, Russia has attempted to establish itself as a counterweight to American power and to rebuild Russian influence in the former Soviet region.

Russia's quasi-imperial behavior in parts of the former Soviet Union and its refusal to be bound by democratic principles have kept it from becoming fully integrated into the international community. Yet

it is far more open than it was under Soviet rule, and its leaders recognize that they cannot retreat into isolation and autarky. They are also aware of the grave vulnerabilities Russia faces—its declining population, aging infrastructure, dependence on immigrant labor, and overreliance on natural resources for state revenues. Thus, while they seek to be a hegemonic power in the territory of the former Soviet Union, they also do not want to resurrect Russia's role as the United States' enemy in the bipolar world; they would prefer that Russia be one of several major powers in a multipolar world.

Russia's vast territory, weak government capacity, and tradition of state domination over society make it likely that the primary objective of its leaders for the foreseeable future will be to strengthen the state, in both its internal and its international dimensions. The end of the Communist regime and the dissolution of the Soviet Union damaged the state's capacity to enforce the laws, protect its citizens, and provide basic social services. Favorable economic conditions in the 2000s enabled the state to rebuild its power at home and abroad, but the crisis of 2008 and 2009 revealed Russia's susceptibility to trends in international financial and energy markets. In the long run, self-sustaining economic development will require the rule of law and effective institutions for articulating and aggregating social interests. The viability of Russia's post-Communist state will ultimately depend on how responsive and adaptive its institutions are to the demands of Russia's citizens in a globalized and interdependent world.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- What is the formal relationship between president and prime minister in Russia? What determines the actual powers wielded by each?
- What effects did the constitutional struggles of 1992 and 1993 have on the features of the 1993 constitution?
- How did President Putin go about strengthening the power of the central government vis-à-vis regional governments? What were his reasons for shifting the balance of power in this way?
- What are the main similarities and differences between the channels of elite recruitment under the Soviet system and today?
- Most Russians evaluate the pre-Gorbachev Soviet system favorably, yet would prefer not to bring it back. How would you explain this apparent contradiction?
- Why has United Russia been so successful as a "party of power"?
- What are the main obstacles to the rule of law in Russia? What changes in the political system would be required to overcome them?

KEY TERMS

Chechnia
commercial courts (*arbitrazhnye sudy*)
Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)
Constitutional Court
Federation Council
Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FITUR)
glasnost'
Gorbachev, Mikhail
law-governed state (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*)
League of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers
Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich
Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)
loans for shares
Medvedev, Dmitrii Anatol'evich
nomenklatura
oligarchs
party of power
perestroika
presidential decrees
privatization
procuracy
Public Chamber
Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE)
Security Council
shock therapy
Stalin, Joseph
State Council
State Duma
United Russia

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The main institutions of the federal government—the president, the parliament, and the government: **www.gov.ru/index.html** (most of the content accessible through this site is in Russian, but some resources are in English).

An e-mail newsletter containing news stories and commentary: **www.cdi.org/russia/johnson.**

A wide range of political resources: **www.politicalresources.net/russia.htm.**

The University of Pittsburgh's links to resources on Russia: **www.ucis.pitt.edu/reesweb.**

A joint Internet project by a team of Russians and Americans: **www.friends-partners.org.**

The *Moscow Times* is an English-language daily newspaper primarily for expatriates: **www.themoscowtimes.com.**

The University of Strathclyde's Center for the Study of Public Policy provides public opinion and electoral information from Russia: **www.RussiaVotes.org.**

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18. Reported in Polit.ru, December 10, 2007; full report in BBC World Service Poll, "World Divided on Press Freedom," www.globescan.com/news_archives/bbc75. Thirteen other countries from the developed and developing worlds were surveyed.
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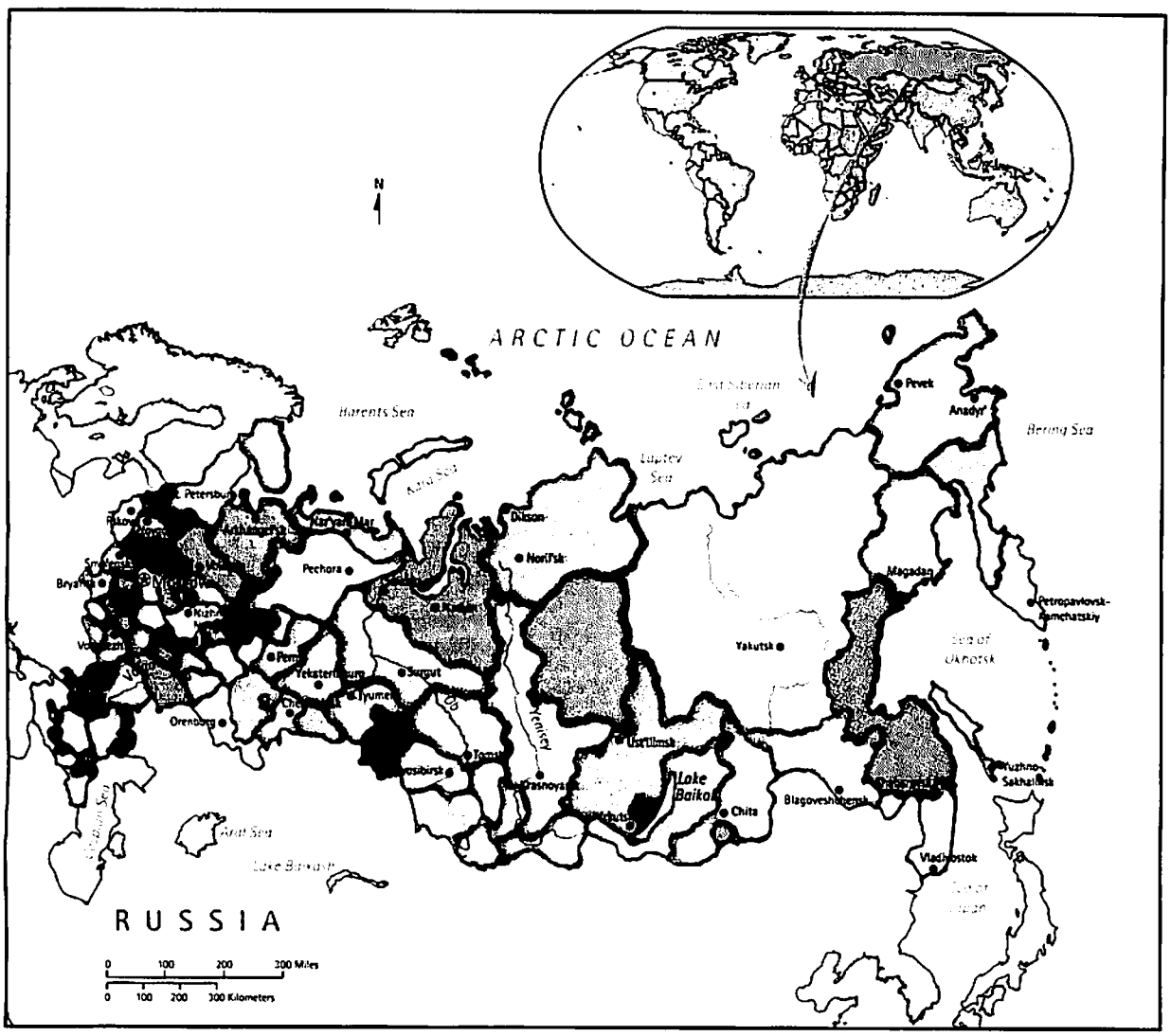
N
ARCTIC OCEAN
Barents Sea
Kara Sea
Laptev Sea
East Siberian Sea
Bering Sea
Sea of Okhotsk
Pevek
Anadyr'
Dikson
Noril'sk
Pechora
Magadan
Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy
Yakutsk
Perm
Yekaterinburg
Surgut
Tyumen
Orenburg
Tomsk
Krasnoyarsk
Ust'-Ilimsk
Lake Baikal
Chita
Blagoveshchensk
Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk
Vladivostok
Aral Sea
Caspian Sea
Lake Balkash
RUSSIA
0 100 200 300 Miles
0 100 200 300 Kilometers

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