



Russia — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[Regarding the time from 1917 to 1991, Russia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics are treated as distinct territorial entities in this dataset, diverging from the common practice in most international relations datasets. For instance, Gleditsch and Ward assigned Russia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the same code (365), thereby collapsing the distinction between the two. However, for the purposes of a political regimes dataset that tracks territorial units and their institutional characteristics, this conflation is conceptually problematic.

This dataset codes the USSR as a separate territorial entity from 1922 to 1991, with Russia (the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, RSFSR) coded as "Part of Other Country (USSR)" during this period, analogous to the treatment of Ukraine, Belarus, and other Soviet republics. This approach is justified on three grounds: First, the USSR was a formally federal state with constitutionally defined borders distinct from those of the RSFSR. The RSFSR was one of 15 constituent republics within the USSR, each with nominal constitutional status as separate territorial units. Treating Russia and the USSR as identical would conflate a constituent part with the federal whole, which is inconsistent with how federal states are handled elsewhere in the dataset. Second, the institutional structure of the USSR was not identical to that of the RSFSR. The USSR had its own government institutions (Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Council of Ministers of the USSR, Communist Party of the Soviet Union), which were legally and administratively distinct from the corresponding RSFSR institutions. While the RSFSR dominated the USSR politically and demographically, this dominance does not eliminate the analytical distinction between the two entities. Third, coding Russia and the USSR as distinct entities enables more precise regime classification. The USSR as a whole can be classified as a Communist Ideocracy, while the RSFSR within it is coded as Part of Other Country [of USSR], parallel to how other Soviet republics are treated. This approach maintains conceptual consistency: if Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia are coded as Part of Other Country [of USSR] rather than as independent regime cases during the Soviet period, the same logic applies to the RSFSR.]

11/02/1721 Start Autocratic Monarchy: On this date, the Russian Empire was formed.¹ From 1894, Tsar Nicholas II reigned the Empire, making him the last Emperor of Russia. Under him, the opposition, especially from the far left and center was repressed.² On 01/22/1905 the so called First Russian Revolution began as a massive wave of political and social unrest. The displeasure of the demonstrators was directed against the Tsar. As a result, Tsar Nicholas II was compelled to enact several reforms. In accordance with LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1900 to 1905 V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1906 and 1907, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. From 1908 to 1916, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us

as indicating that political liberties are not really present. On 05/06/1906, the Russian Constitution of 1906 was adopted, which created the State Duma and a multi-party system. However, the Duma had limited powers and was outranked by the Tsar.³ Therefore, the Russian Empire nominally became a constitutional monarchy. According to LIED, only legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. No executive elections were present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. While formally Russia was a constitutional monarchy after 05/06/1906 according to our criteria it remained to be an autocratic monarchy.

02/25/1917 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: The February Revolution ended the rule of the Tsar. On 03/15/1917 universal suffrage was established by a declaration of the Provisional Government.⁴ The provisional government aimed to organize elections for the Russian Constituent Assembly and its convention. Initially led by Prince Georgy Lvov, the provisional government embarked on a series of short-lived reforms in its early weeks under his prime ministership. These reforms aimed to significantly liberalize Russia, introducing universal adult suffrage, granting freedoms of press and speech, abolishing capital punishment, and removing all legal restrictions based on religion, class, and race.⁵ In July 1917 Alexander Kerensky took over.⁶ According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 1917, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. While the direction of the transitional regime was liberalizing, it was nonetheless a borderline case with an unclear future.

11/07/1917 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Communist Ideocracy: On this date the Communists seized power in Petrograd by armed military and civilian supporters (Brooker 1995: 51, Skallerup 1991). However, a partially democratic election of the Constituent Assembly still took place later in November. On 01/18/1918, this assembly passed a decree declaring Russia to be a democratic federal republic,⁷ but had been dissolved by the Bolsheviks on the day after the proclamation. After the communist party under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin took over, there were still many who opposed the Communist Party. This conflict sparked the Civil War, pitting the White Army against the Red Army. The White Army comprised the opposition party, while the Red Army consisted of the government's armed forces and those who supported Vladimir Lenin. The Civil War led to the loss of 10–30 million lives.⁸ For 1918–1922, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. According to LIED, only legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. No executive elections were present. LIED still identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are not really present.

12/30/1922 End Communist Ideocracy [as separate country]/Start Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic became part of the USSR. However, the communist regime continued to rule. From that point on the country in the dataset is listed as USSR.

12/21/1991 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Democratizing Regime]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On 12/21/1991 the USSR was officially abolished when representatives of eleven of the constituent republics signed an accord that replaced it with the Commonwealth of Independent States. On 12/25/1991, the Russian Federation officially became an independent state (Roeder 1993: 244).⁹ Nevertheless, in 1990, the Congress of People's Deputies was elected under Soviet regulations, allocating the majority of seats to members of the Communist Party and other affiliated „public organizations.“ The Congress convened biannually to deliberate on constitutional matters and approve government personnel changes. The Supreme Soviet, a smaller standing legislature, was elected from the ranks of the Congress members. Civil and political liberties were overwhelmingly safeguarded (McColm 1993: 424–428). From this point on the regime is classified as an electoral hybrid regime since the presidential elections from 06/12/1991. Based on our observations,

multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED considers the elections as not competitive until 1992 and competitive afterwards. V-Dem's CEI indicates an ambiguous state regarding the cleanliness of the elections. Whereas V-Dem's EF&FI considers the elections as somewhat free and fair. In 1992, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. For 1992, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. In addition, no political liberties were present per LIED, while V-Dem's PCLI indicates that political liberties were somewhat given. Between 1992 and 2003 V-Dem's LDI classifies the degree of liberal democracy at a level which we label as not really. In this period Russia was a borderline case between an electoral democracy and an electoral hybrid regime.

09/21/1993 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: Boris Yeltsin, facing political deadlock and resistance to a shock therapy agenda moved to eliminate his political opponents. The final act of his self-coup was to suspend the legislature which he did effectively. When the parliament refused to dissolve, voted to impeach him and proclaimed the vice president as acting president, Yeltsin ordered troops to storm the parliament.¹⁰ With his vice president already suspended, Yeltsin had full executive control.¹¹ In 1993, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions, according to Polity5. For 1993, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 for the assessed regime period designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. In 1993, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present.

12/12/1993 End Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: In December 1993, a new federal assembly was elected under revised rules. Eight parties that had backed the parliament against Yeltsin were barred from participating (Ellison 1993, Simes 1994: 67-70, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 90). The elections were of ambiguous quality to say the least. Va-PoReg considers this regime period to be a paradigmatic case of an electoral hybrid regime. After Yeltsin retired at the end of 1999, incumbent prime minister and acting president Vladimir Putin won the presidential elections in the first round. LIED identifies the elections as competitive. V-Dem's CEI indicates an ambiguous state regarding the cleanliness of elections. The overall elections conditions were somewhat free and fair until 1995. For three years the conditions are considered as ambiguous. Between 1999 and 2002 somewhat freedom and fairness are given according to V-Dem's EF&FI. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Between 1994 and 1999, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power. From 2000 to 2003, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. For 1994-1999, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. In 2000, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. In 2001, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 2002 and 2003, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. As classified by FH until 1997, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. Per FH's scoring for 1998, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. As classified by

FH from 1999 to 2003, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present until 2000 and are ambiguous afterwards.

12/07/2003 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: Scholars often cite the 2003 parliamentary election as a pivotal moment in Russian politics, as it signaled the federal parliament's transformation into little more than a rubber-stamp institution.¹² During the 2004 and 2008 elections, state-controlled media had displayed clear bias in favor of the incumbent and observers described the elections as neither free, nor fair.¹³ From 2003 onwards, both V-Dem's LDI and FH rank Russia as low as possible for liberal democratic freedoms. After two four-year presidential terms from 2000 to 2008 in office, Putin remained the de facto leader, while working as prime minister with Dmitry Medvedev took over as president.¹⁴ Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, violating the constitution's two-term limit.¹⁵ Medvedev became prime minister from 2012 to 2020. Alleged forgeries were reported 2012 that could have affected Putin's victory in the first round.¹⁶ Since 2003, politics in Russia has been dominated by the pro-Putin United Russia party which holds a supermajority in the State Duma, the ruling party effectively controls proceedings, rendering the parliament little more than a rubber stamp for Kremlin and government agendas.¹⁷ The eighth presidential elections took place in Russia from 03/15 to 17/2024. The process was widely anticipated as predetermined, with prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny barred from running due to a controversial prior conviction. Navalny's death in prison just before the election raised suspicions, further undermining the credibility of the electoral process. Increased political repression under Putin's administration, particularly following the conflict with Ukraine, lead us – based on reports on international observers, to classify the election as not free and fair. The elections also took place in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, where reports of irregularities, including ballot stuffing and coercion, surfaced.¹⁸ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 2004, the country lost its electoral competitiveness according to LIED. V-Dem's CEI declares the cleanliness as ambiguous until 2007. Since 2008, not real cleanliness is scored. Until 2020, the freedom and fairness was classified as ambiguous again. In 2021 the election underlined no real freedom and fairness (V-Dem EF&FI). According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Regarding the political liberties, they were absent for the entire time (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous until 2013, as not really present until 2021 and as absent since 2022 regarding the state of political liberties. From 2003 to 2006, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks. Since 2007, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. From 2004 to 2007, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Since 2008, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources Russia 1900-1917, 1991 onwards (Beichelt 2004, Evans 2008, Fish 2005, Kubicek 1994, Remington 2000, Shevëtisova/Tait 2007, Van Herpen 2013, Cameron 1994b, Cameron 1998, Dawisha/Parrott 1997, Hanson 2006)

See for the time between 12/28/1922 and 12/21/1991 also Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire

- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Revolution_of_1905
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Republic; https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Russia_1918?lang=en
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Republic
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_communist_in_the_Soviet_Union
- ⁹ <http://tinyurl.com/4xqb473>
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Rutskoy“\o „Aleksandr Rutskoy
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Russian_constitutional_crisis
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Russian_legislative_election
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Russian_presidential_election
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitry_Medvedev
- ¹⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2022>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Russian_presidential_election
- ¹⁷ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698018](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)698018)
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Russian_presidential_election

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