



Union of Soviet Socialist Republics — Va-PoReg Country Report

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For the time before 12/28/1922, see Russia.

12/30/1922 Start Communist Ideocracy [as Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]: On this date, the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR was ratified by the First Congress of Soviets of the USSR, formally establishing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The four founding members were the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, which itself comprised the Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. All four founding republics are treated in this dataset as constituent members rather than as subordinate units absorbed into a Russian successor state (Pipes 1997). Russia (RSFSR) accordingly ceases to be coded as an independent entity from this date and is subsumed into the USSR entry. This approach diverges from datasets such as Correlates of War, which assign the USSR the same state identifier as Russia on the basis of continuity of international legal personality. Va-PoReg instead prioritizes internal constitutional and political structure, under which the USSR constitutes a genuinely new political entity distinct from its predecessor states. The USSR is coded as a federal rather than a unitary entity for the following reason: the founding Treaty and the subsequent Soviet Constitution of 1924 explicitly guaranteed each union republic a formal right of accession and secession. This right was at minimum procedurally real during the founding phase. The successive accession of additional republics (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 1924, Tajikistan in 1929, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 1936) occurred as formally distinct constitutional acts, each republic ratifying membership through its own legislative organs. While Stalin's consolidation of power from the mid-1920s onward rendered the secession right effectively non-exercisable in practice, its formal constitutional existence throughout the Soviet period provides the basis for treating USSR constituent republics as distinct dataset entries rather than mere administrative subdivisions of a unitary state. This is consistent with the dataset's general criterion that sub-units of formally federal states are included as separate entries where the federal constitution explicitly guarantees a right of secession to constituent units. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union retained uninterrupted ideocratic control throughout the transition from the RSFSR to the USSR; the regime type therefore remains Communist Ideocracy. Constituent union republics that had previously been coded as independent entities (including Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) transition to Part of Other Country [USSR] from 12/30/1922 onward, or from the date of Soviet military incorporation where that preceded the formal founding of the USSR. Following Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin came to power. During this period, the Gulag system of forced labor camps was further extended. Additionally, Stalin executed the Great Purge, aiming to eliminate both real and perceived adversaries.¹ After the outbreak of World War II, Germany invaded the USSR.² The Western territories of the USSR, roughly 15 to 20% of its entire territory, were occupied by German forces between 06/22/1941 and 10/1944. In the aftermath of World War II, the territory occupied by the Red Army formed various Soviet satellite states. The beginning of the Cold War saw the Eastern Bloc of the Soviet Union confront the Western Bloc of the United States, with the latter grouping becoming largely united in 1949 under NATO and the former grouping becoming largely united in 1955 under the Warsaw Pact. Following Stalin's death in 1953, a period known as de-Stalinization occurred under the leadership of Nikita

Khrushchev.³ The internal development of the USSR underwent significant changes. This period was symbolized by Khrushchev's Secret Speech in 1956, which criticized Stalin's methods and indicated a shift towards more lenient domestic policies. There was an increased focus on improving living standards and consumer goods production, alongside sustained investment in heavy industry. Khrushchev also initiated agricultural reforms, most notably the Virgin Lands Campaign, which had mixed success. Leonid Brezhnev's leadership from 1964 to 1982, often referred to as the Era of Stagnation, marked a return to more conservative and bureaucratic elements, reversing many of Khrushchev's reforms. This period was characterized by an emphasis on heavy industry with less attention paid to consumer goods and agriculture, leading to economic stagnation. Political and social life remained tightly controlled, with limited tolerance for dissent. Brezhnev's foreign policy was defined by the Brezhnev Doctrine, which justified Soviet intervention in Warsaw Pact countries to maintain communist regimes. These shifts in leadership and policy within the USSR reflected the evolving nature of the Soviet regime, impacting both domestic and international dynamics during this critical period of the Cold War. For a detailed exploration of these transformations, the following sources provide extensive information.⁴ On 03/11/1985 Mikhail Gorbachev took over as General Secretary of the Communist Party. Implementing his policy of glasnost ('openness'), a significant cultural thaw unfolded under Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership. Freedoms of expression and information saw substantial expansion, enabling the press and broadcasting to express unprecedented candor in their reporting and criticism. The government eventually completely rejected the country's legacy of Stalinist totalitarian rule. Gorbachev's perestroika ('restructuring') policy aimed at the initial, modest efforts to democratize the Soviet political system. From 1923 to 1988, 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. For 1989, 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 1990 and 1991, 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. According to LIED, only legislative elections were held until 1935 but they were not categorized as multiparty. From 1936 to 1989, both executive and legislative elections were held yet they were not classified as multiparty. Between 1990 and 1991 multiparty executive and legislative elections were present. Some elections to party and government positions saw the introduction of multicandidate contests and the use of the secret ballot.⁵ For the communist period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent until 1986, are not really present until 1989 and were in an ambiguous state in 1990.

08/21/1991 End Communist Ideocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: On 06/12/1991 a free and fair presidential election in Russia took place, which was won by Boris Yeltsin.⁶ The communist candidate, Nikolai Ryzhkov roughly received 17.2 per cent of the vote. On the level of the USSR civilian and military communist hardliners, including Vice President Gennady Yanayev greatly opposing Michail Gorbachev's domestic reforms and his plan to break up the Union into independent republics launched a coup on 08/21/1991. The coup was broken by public action and a reluctance by the hardliners to shed blood. In the aftermath, Gorbachev was not in effective command with power in effect being transferred to Boris Yeltsin.⁷ We code this regime change event as a popular uprising to emphasize the role of anti-authoritarian protests in thwarting the coup attempt. Since Yeltsin only was elected on the Russian level, we classify the regime on the level of the USSR in this period as a democratizing regime. In 1991, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties, indicating an intermediate state between present and absent.

12/21/1991 End Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [Democratizing Regime]: On this date the USSR was officially abolished.

For the time after 12/21/1991, see Russia.

Additional sources (Brzezinski 1956, Huber et al. 2015, LaPorte/Morgan/Worley 2008, Malia 1994, Voslensky 1984, White 2010, Zaslavsky/Brym 1978)

Notes

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

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union>; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Communist-Party-of-the-Soviet-Union>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Russian_presidential_election

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Soviet_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat_attempt;
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union/The-attempted-coup>

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