

Red Square in Moscow, from the Saint Basil's Cathedral  
Wikimedia/Christophe Meneboeuf

# Russian



Russian girls in traditional clothing  
Flickr/Ninara

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Map of the Russian Federation  
Wikimedia/Arciade

# Chapter 1 | Profile



The Kremlin and Bolshoy Kamenny Bridge  
Wikimedia/Andrey Korzun

## Introduction

Modern Russia is the product of more than five centuries of territorial expansion initiated by the once-modest principality of Muscovy. At 17,098,242 sq km (6,601,668 sq mi), it is nearly twice the size of the United States and occupies over one-ninth of the world's total land area. As the Russian Empire grew, it absorbed numerous sizable ethnic groups living on its expanding periphery. Today, more than 190 ethnic groups live in the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup>

Russia possesses a wealth of natural resources, but its harsh climate and challenging topography make large portions of it relatively inhospitable to human habitation. Russia has a population of around 142 million people, heavily concentrated in the westernmost fifth of the country, extending from the Baltic Sea, south to the Caspian Sea and eastward, parallel to the Kazakh border; elsewhere, sizeable pockets of the population are isolated and generally found in the south.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Olga L Medvedkov et al., "Russia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>

<sup>2</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Geography: Land Boundaries," in *The World Factbook*, retrieved on 27 October 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/russia/#geography>

## Geography

Russia is the world's largest country by landmass, encompassing about one-eighth of the planet's inhabited land area. At 17,098,242 sq km (6,601,668 sq mi), it is nearly twice the size of the United States; it borders 14 countries and spans 11 time zones. Russia sits at the Eurasian landmass's north end in Europe (European Russia) and Asia (Siberia). In 2021, Russia's population was 142.3 million, making it the world's ninth-most populous country.<sup>3</sup>

Russia extends almost halfway around the Northern Hemisphere, stretching from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. At its most distant points, it measures about 9,000 km (5,592 mi) from east to west and 3,800 km (2,361 mi) from north to south. Russia has the world's longest border, at 57,792 km (35,910 mi), of which 20,139 km (12,594 mi) is on land. Countries bordering Russia in its south are North Korea, China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Caspian and Black Seas. To the southwest and west are Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Norway, and the Baltic Sea. West of the mainland, the small, detached region of Kaliningrad is wedged between Lithuania and Poland on the Baltic Sea coast.<sup>4</sup>

## Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

The Russian landmass exhibits a wide range of topographic features. The country's western half consists of two immense plains separated by the Ural Mountains, which mark the division between European and Siberian Russia. An extensive belt of plateaus and mountains covers most of Siberia or eastern Russia.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Kola Peninsula***

The Kola Peninsula lies in the northwestern corner of Russia, adjacent to Finland and Norway. The Barents Sea, a part of the Arctic Ocean, lies north of the peninsula, and the White Sea, a bay of the Barents Sea, surrounds it south and southeast. The Kola Peninsula lies almost entirely within the Arctic Circle, covering roughly 100,000 sq km (38,610 sq mi). Glaciers cover much of the peninsula, and its interior has provided a wealth of ores and minerals. The land is tundra (Arctic plains with permafrost soil) in the north, and the entire peninsula receives less than 25 cm (10 in) of rainfall annually. Few plants can survive in the infertile soil and cold climate.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Russian Plain***

The Russian Plain (also known as the East European Plain) is the European region of Russia. It extends from the western border east to the Ural Mountains and from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Caspian Sea and Black Sea in the south. The Russian Plain is relatively flat and low, with an average elevation of 200 m (656 ft). The forces of glaciers, streams, and winds have layered its surface with sedimentary rock. This massive plain extends from the Caspian and Black Seas in southern Russia to the Arctic Ocean in the north. In the east, it extends to the base of the Ural Mountains.<sup>7</sup>

3 Geoffrey Alan Hosking et al., "Russia: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia#ref38573>

4 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., "Geography," in *Russia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), retrieved on 3 February 2022, <https://countrystudies.us/russia/21.htm>

5 *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, "Russia," 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/513251/Russia>

6 A.V. Litvinenko, N.N. Filatov, and V.A. Volkov, "Chapter 1: Geography of the White Sea and Its Watershed," in *White Sea: Its Marine Environment and Ecosystem Dynamics Influenced by Global Change* (New York: Springer, 2005), 10.

7 Yuri V Medvedkov et al., "Russia: Land: Relief: The Russian Plain," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>

The Russian Plain is home to several major cities, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The northern region of the plain contains several lakes and swamps amid an expanse of poorly drained terrain. Farther south, the soil is rich, with agricultural lands receiving irrigation from the Volga and Don rivers. In the southern Russian Plain, the Caspian Lowland surrounds the northern side of the Caspian Sea and extends through both Russian and Kazak territory. As it spans the boundary between Europe and Asia, the Caspian Lowland forms the site of some of both continents' lowest elevations.<sup>8</sup>

### **Caucasus Mountains**

Forming a southern boundary between Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, the Greater Caucasus Mountains extend approximately 1,200 km (746 mi) from the northeastern edge of the Black Sea to the western shore of the Caspian Sea. The Kura River forms a watershed on the eastern side of the range and drains into the Caspian Sea. Several mountains above 4,570 m (15,000 ft) exist in the northern Caucasus. This includes the extinct volcanic peak known as Mount Elbrus, which stands at an altitude of 5,642 m (18,510 ft) and is Europe's highest peak.<sup>9</sup>

### **Ural Mountains**

Running in a general north-south direction, the Ural Mountains have traditionally marked the boundary between Europe and Asia. The Russian Plain and the European region of Russia end at the Ural Mountains. The Ural range extends into the Arctic Ocean as an archipelago called Novaya Zemlya. The average altitude of the range is approximately 600 m (1,968 ft). Most of the ethnic Russian population in the region lives in the southern portion of the Urals in the large cities of Perm, Ufa, Yekaterinburg, and Chelyabinsk.<sup>10</sup>

### **West Siberian Plain**

Spanning the vast area between the Arctic Ocean in the north and the central Asian steppes to the south, the West Siberian Plain is the largest region in Russia and one of the world's largest regions of uninterrupted flatland. It begins east of the Ural Mountains and covers an area of more than 2.6 million sq km (1 million sq mi). Its eastern border is the Yenisey River in central Siberia. Much of the plain is less than 100 m (328 ft) in elevation. The land is higher and drier in the south, where most of the regional population lives. The North Siberian Lowland extends northeast from the West Siberian Plain, separating the Taymyr Peninsula's Byrranga Mountains from the Central Siberian Plateau. The lowland's east-west length is 3,000 km (1,864 mi), approximately 50–70 m (165–230 ft) above sea level. Swamps intermittently cover this region.<sup>11</sup>

### **Central Siberian Plateau**

From the Yenisey River in the west to the Lena River in the east, the Central Siberian Plateau has an average elevation of 500–700 m (1,650–2,300 ft). Erosion from regional rivers has formed deep canyons in the plateau, and complex geologic processes have layered it in unusual ways. The plateau consists of a mix of metamorphic, igneous, and sedimentary rock that volcanic lava covers in places. The North Siberian Lowland and the Taymyr

8 Yuri V Medvedkov et al., "Russia: Land: Relief: The Russian Plain," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>

9 Lewis Owen et al., "Caucasus," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 4 September 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Caucasus>

10 Thomas M. Poulse and Yevgeny V. Yastrebov. "Ural Mountains," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 March 2021, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Ural-Mountains>

11 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Northern Siberian Lowland," 20 July 1998, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/North-Siberian-Lowland>

Peninsula border the plateau on the north, and the volcanic Putoran Mountains, which rise as high as 1,701 m (5,581 ft), border it on the northwest. The Eastern Sayan Mountains border the southern part of the plateau.<sup>12</sup>

### **Taymyr Peninsula**

Located in north central Siberia, the Taymyr Peninsula is the northernmost land extension in Asia and Europe. Its territory covers around 400,000 sq km (154,400 sq mi). To the south and north of the Byrranga Mountains lie tundra lowlands. The Laptev Sea bounds the peninsula east of the Byrranga Mountains. The Gulf of Yenisey and the Kara Sea lie west of the peninsula. To the north is Vilkitsky Strait, a string of large islands (known as Severnaya Zemlya), and the Arctic Ocean.<sup>13</sup>

### **Mountains of the South and East**

Approximately one-fourth of Russia's landmass consists of an extensive series of high mountain ranges that wrap around the southern and eastern regions of the country. At the western end of this region, the Altai Mountains border eastern Kazakhstan, a small strip of northern China, and the northwestern region of Mongolia. Mount Belukha rises to 4,506 m (14,783 ft) within this range, making it one of the highest points in the Asian part of Russia. Farther east, the Sayan Mountains surround the Tuva Basin and span a segment of the Russian-Mongolian frontier. These mountains are slightly lower in elevation than the Altai Mountains.<sup>14</sup>

Near Lake Baikal in southern Siberia, additional mountain ranges spread to the northeast. The Yablonovy and Stanovoy ranges extend eastward toward the Sea of Okhotsk, dividing the drainage systems of eastern Siberia's longest rivers, the Lena and Amur Rivers. At the eastern end of the Stanovoy Range, the Dzhugdzhur Mountains fan northeastward along the shore of the Sea of Okhotsk, eventually merging into the Verkhoyansk Mountains, which rise to heights of 2,389 m (7,838 ft). The Chersky Range lies northeast of the Verkhoyansk Range and follows a similar course. At the eastern end of these mountain chains lies the Kolyma Range, which extends northeastward. The Kolyma Lowland, a swampy region extending north to the East Siberian Sea, is north of these converging mountain ranges.<sup>15</sup>

The Kamchatka Peninsula extends southward from the far northeastern region of Russia into the North Pacific Ocean, separating the Sea of Okhotsk from the Bering Sea. The peninsula's two mountain chains include more than 125 volcanoes, 22 active; this region constitutes the northwestern section of the seismic "ring of fire" encircles the Pacific. The highest volcano is Klyuchevskaya Sopka, which reaches an elevation of 4,750 m (15,584 ft). Several others rise to more than 3,050 m (10,007 ft) in altitude. Offshore lie the Kuril Islands, which similarly contain several active and inactive volcanoes, extending in a chain southward and ending to the immediate northeast of Japan.<sup>16</sup>

12 I.A. Sokolov, T.V. Ananko, and D. Ye. Konyushkov, "Chapter 13: The Soil Cover of Central Siberia," in *Cryosols: Permafrost-Affected Soils*, ed. John M. Kimble (New York: Springer, 2004), 305.

13 BBC News, "Russia's Arctic: Taimyr Peninsula," 26 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23799682>

14 Lewis Owen and Nikolay Ivanovich Mikhaylov. "Altai Mountains," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 12 March 2019, retrieved 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Altai-Mountains>

15 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Verkhoyansk Mountains," 16 November 2001, retrieved 8 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Verkhoyansk-Mountains>

16 Richard Taruskin et al., "Russia: Land: Relief: The Mountains of the South and East," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved 8 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Russia#toc38574>

## Climate

Russia lies north of 50°N latitude, except for the Caucasus region, the adjoining lower Don and Volga river basins, a few areas in southern Siberia, and the southeast maritime region along the Pacific Ocean. By comparison, Alaska is the only portion of the United States that lies north of this latitude. As a result, most of Russia experiences long and cold winters and short, cool summers. By comparison, Alaska is the only portion of the United States that lies north of this latitude. As a result, Russia's northern and western frontiers are vulnerable to oceanic influences from the Arctic and Atlantic oceans.<sup>17</sup>

Average annual temperatures in most of Russia range from freezing to well below freezing. Excluding Antarctica, the coldest January temperature in the world, -71°C (-96°F), was recorded at Oymyakon in the eastern mountains of Siberia. On the other hand, in summer, Russia experiences temperatures over 38°C (100°F). Summer temperatures are more moderate and vary according to latitude compared to temperatures in winter, when variations are more significant, moving west to east rather than north to south. Average July temperatures measure between 4°C (39°F) in the northern Arctic islands to 20°C (68°F) across southern Russia.<sup>18</sup>

In the southern region of western Russia, a steppe climate begins at the Black Sea. It extends to the immediate northeast, encompassing the North Caucasian Plain, the southern reaches of the Volga Valley and the Ural Mountains, and southwestern Siberia. Cold and dry winters characterize this climate. In the central region of western Russia, a continental environment extends from the Baltic and Black Seas to the Ural Mountains. The weather in this zone is temperate and less harsh than in the colder regions.<sup>19</sup>

A subarctic climate zone in northern Russia stretches east from Saint Petersburg, across the Urals, and over most of Siberia. Farther north, a tundra climate zone spans the Arctic coast from west to east, reaching into eastern Siberia. Dry and extremely frigid winters, interrupted by a short summer, characterize this climate. Extreme polar desert conditions characterize the Arctic islands.<sup>20</sup>

In the far northeast, winter temperatures reach extreme lows in a region between the Verkhoyansk Mountains and the Chersky Range.<sup>7</sup> Oymyakon and Verkhoyansk, two villages in this so-called "pole of cold," have both claimed the title for the lowest temperature ever recorded outside Antarctica, with figures of -68°C (-90°F) and -71°C (-96°F), respectively.<sup>21</sup>

17 Sergey Vodovozov et al., "Russia: Land: Climate of Russia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved 13 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>

18 James F. Petersen, Dorothy Sack, and Robert E. Gabler, *Fundamentals of Physical Geography* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning, 2011), 189.

19 Joseph G. Boonman and Sergey S. Mikhalev, "Chapter 10: The Russian Steppe," in *Grasslands of the World*, eds. J.M. Suttie, S.G. Reynolds, and C. Batello (Rome: FAO, 2005), retrieved on 12 February 2023, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/y8344e/y8344e0h.htm>

20 DigitalAccessProject.net, "Climate Graphs Interactive World Map," n.d., retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.digitalatlasproject.net/themes/climate-systems/climate-graphs>

21 James F. Petersen, Dorothy Sack, and Robert E. Gabler, *Fundamentals of Physical Geography* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning, 2011), 189.

## Bodies of Water

Russia has some of the longest rivers in the world. Although some serve as essential transportation networks, ice blocks obstruct many of them for extended periods of the year. Many of the country's rivers and waterways provide hydroelectric power and water for irrigation waters. Many of its coastal waters and river deltas are ice-bound for most or all of the year.<sup>22</sup>

North of Russia lies the Arctic Ocean and its coastal subdivisions, which include the Barents Sea (in the west), the Kara and Laptev Seas (to the north of central Russia), and the East Siberian Sea (in the east). The Chukchi Sea lies off Russia's far northeast coastline and the Bering Strait that separates Alaska and Russia. South of the strait lies the Bering Sea, which bounds the eastern side of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula and extends into the North Pacific Ocean. On the western side of the Kamchatka Peninsula lies the Sea of Okhotsk. The Sea of Japan lies on Russia's far southeastern coast.<sup>23</sup>

### **Black Sea**

The Black Sea, shaped like an oval, is situated in Europe's southeastern corner. It connects to the Atlantic Ocean through various water bodies, including the Bosphorus, Sea of Marmara, Dardanelles, Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. The Crimean Peninsula, annexed by Moscow from Ukraine in 2014, juts into the Black Sea from the north and is linked to the smaller Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait. The coastline of the Black Sea is primarily uniform. Notably, Russia's Black Sea Fleet, based in Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula, has become a focal point in the ongoing conflict since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.<sup>24</sup>

### **Sea of Azov**

The Sea of Azov is crucial for Russia because of its proximity and access to critical maritime routes leading to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, which are essential for Russia's trade and naval operations. The sea is rich in marine life and fisheries and has potential for oil and gas resources. Its political importance increased after the Eastern Ukraine conflict and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. The construction of the Crimean Bridge over the Kerch Strait, connecting the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea, has strengthened Russia's control over these routes, causing more territorial disputes with Ukraine and emphasizing the sea's role in regional politics and security.<sup>25</sup>

### **Arctic Ocean**

Most of the major rivers of Siberia flow generally south to north, emptying into various arms of the Arctic Ocean. The largest of these rivers are the Ob, Yenisey, and Lena, which are among the longest rivers in the world. The Ob is the principal river of the West Siberian Plain, and it has the world's sixth-largest drainage basin. On its upstream stretch, it supplies the power for a large hydroelectric plant at Novosibirsk, Russia's third-largest city and a major industrial center.<sup>26</sup>

22 Caitlyn L. Antrim, "Chapter 7: The Russian Arctic in the Twenty-First Century," in *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change*, ed. James Kraska (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 107–28.

23 Herón Márquez, *Russia in Pictures* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2004), 8–9.

24 The Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution, "Geography," 2019, retrieved on 26 January 2024, <http://www.blacksea-commission.org/geography.asp>

25 Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Sea of Azov," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 October 2023, retrieved on 17 November 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sea-of-Azov>

26 Lewis Owen et al., "Ob River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 18 June 2018, retrieved on 9 February 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ob-River>.

## Volga and Don Rivers

The Volga is the longest river in Europe but only the fourth longest in Russia. It originates in the hills that lie to the northwest of Moscow. The Volga drains much of the East European Plain, winding 3,530 km (2,193 mi) toward the Caspian Sea in the south, where it empties. The Volga has two main tributaries, the Kama and Oka Rivers, and several linking canals. The entire Volga system carries two-thirds of the nation's riverine traffic.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning southeast of Moscow, the Don River flows 1,870 km (1,162 mi) on its course across the southwestern region of European Russia. It empties into the Sea of Azov, a northeastern extension of the Black Sea. At Volgograd, the Don River links to the Volga River through the Volga-Don Canal, which is 100 km (63 mi) long. Much of the Don River is frozen during the winter and extremely shallow in late summer.<sup>28</sup>

## Ob and Irtysh Rivers

The Ob River and its tributary, the Irtysh River, form Asia's most extensive river system. Measuring a combined length of 5,410 km (3,362 mi), the Ob and the Irtysh drain the West Siberian Plain as they flow northwest from their respective sources in the Altai Mountains. These rivers converge in central Russia, then flow north as the Ob River before emptying into the Arctic Ocean. Before it enters Russia, the Irtysh River passes through northeastern Kazakhstan from its source in northwestern China. For a portion of the year, ice blocks both rivers.<sup>29</sup>

## Yenisey and Lena Rivers

Located on the eastern edge of the West Siberian Plain, the Yenisey River runs north from its headwaters in the eastern Sayan Mountains. It follows a course along the western edge of the Central Siberian Plateau and empties into the Arctic Ocean's Kara Sea. In terms of volume, the Yenisey is the sixth-largest river in the world, carrying more water than any other Russian river system.<sup>30</sup>

The world's tenth-longest, the Lena River, originates in southern Siberia near Lake Baikal. It runs northeast before curving north on the western side of the Verkhoyansk Range, thus separating Russia's eastern mountain territory from the Central Siberian Plateau. It empties into the Arctic Ocean at the Laptev Sea, with a drainage area that covers approximately 2,490,000 sq km (961,000 sq mi). For most of its length, ice blocks the river for at least half of the year.<sup>31</sup>

## Lake Baikal

Formed approximately 20–25 million years ago, Lake Baikal is the world's deepest lake—1,620 m (5,315 ft)—and the oldest freshwater lake. The lake is 636 km (395 mi) long, averages 48 km (30 mi) wide, and covers an area of roughly 31,500 sq km (12,200 sq mi). More than 330 streams and rivers flow into the lake, which holds about one-fifth of the total fresh water on the earth's surface. Mountains that rise steeply from its western shores to heights of more than 2,560 m (8,400 ft) above sea level surround the lake. Several hot mineral springs are in the area, which is

27 Jennifer Eremeeva, "The Volga: A History of Russia's Greatest River' Janet Hartley Explores the River's Roles, Myths and Meanings," 6 June 2021, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/06/06/the-volga-a-history-of-russias-greatest-river-a74106>

28 Philip P. Micklin and Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Gavrilov, "Don River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 December 2019, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Don-River>

29 Liliya Konstantinovna Malik, Owen Lewis, and Philip P. Micklin, "Ob River," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11 June 2018, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ob-River>

30 The Arctic, "Rus Ecology: The Ob, Yenisei and Lena Rivers Contribute About One Half of the Total Freshwater Runoff to the Arctic Ocean," 4 September 2020, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://arctic.ru/ecology/20200904/975660.html>

31 Brian Appleton, ed., "Climate Changes the Water Rules: How Water Managers Can Cope with Today's Climate Variability and Tomorrow's Climate Change" (report, Dialogue on Water and Climate, Netherlands, 2003), 66.

prone to earthquakes. Once famed for its crystal clear waters and nearby forests, Lake Baikal is seriously polluted by industrial activity on the lake's shores.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Pacific Ocean***

The high mountains along much of Russia's Pacific coast severely limit the number of significant rivers flowing to the world's largest ocean. The only major river that flows into the Pacific is the Amur River, which forms the Russian-Chinese border for almost 1,610 km (1,000 mi) from the point where the left-bank Shilka River and the right-bank Argun River meet to form the Amur proper. The Argun forms the Russian-Chinese border for 965 km (600 mi) before its confluence with the Shilka. Near Khabarovsk, the largest city on the Amur, the river bends toward the northeast before eventually flowing into the Tatar Strait near Sakhalin Island. Khabarovsk is also where the Trans-Siberian Railroad crosses the Amur River before turning southward toward the Pacific port city of Vladivostok.<sup>33</sup>

## **Major Cities**

### ***Moscow***

Situated in the west, Moscow is the nation's capital and largest city, with a population of approximately 12.6 million. Moscow is the country's political, economic, industrial, scientific, educational, and cultural center. Czars used Moscow as their command base until 1712 when Saint Petersburg became the nation's capital. Moscow became a critical metallurgical and textile center and a center for the Russian labor movement. In 1918, the capital was transferred back to Moscow. Between 1922 and 1991, the city served as the capital of the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup>

Moscow is home to Moscow State University and more than 270 other higher education institutions. The city houses the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian State Library. Moscow's cultural institutions include the Bolshoi Theater and Ballet, the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, and several monasteries. Public gardens and parks occupy 30% of the city's land, including Gorky Park near the Moscow River, which houses the Moscow Zoo and Botanical Gardens.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Saint Petersburg***

Saint Petersburg (known as Leningrad from 1924–1991) is Russia's largest seaport, with around 5 million residents. The city is located northwest of Moscow on the Gulf of Finland, occupying both banks of the Neva River and several of its islands. During the winter, icebreakers keep the harbor open for shipping. Delta waterways bisect the city, and more than 300 bridges connect its various parts. During June, the city experiences nearly 19 hours of daylight per day.<sup>36</sup>

Between 1712 and 1918, Saint Petersburg was Russia's capital and remains one of the nation's foremost cultural, industrial, and scientific centers. The city was the site of two historical revolutions in 1917 that overthrew the monarchy and installed the Bolsheviks. Saint Petersburg is known as Russia's most European city because of its

32 Hydrotech, "Russia's Lake Baikal Became Extremely Polluted by Harmful Toxic Materials and Anti-WWTP Regulations: The Largest Freshwater Lake in the World is Facing Extreme Pollution," n.d., retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.hydrotech-group.com/blog/russias-lake-baikal-became-extremely-polluted-by-harmful-toxic-materials-and-anti-wwtp-regulations>

33 Brahma Chellaney, *Water: Asia's New Battleground* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 256–60.

34 Central Intelligence Agency, "Russia: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, 09 February 2023, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/russia/#people-and-society>

35 Richard Antony French, Grigory Ioffe, and Kathleen Berton Murrell, "Moscow," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 26 August 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moscow/Administration-and-society>

36 Richard Antony French *et al.*, "Saint Petersburg," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 August 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/St-Petersburg-Russia>

lavishly built cathedrals, palaces, libraries, and universities. A center of theater, music, and dance, Saint Petersburg is home to the famed Mariinsky Opera and Ballet Theater. The city inspired such Russian authors as Dostoyevsky, Pushkin, and Gogol. The Hermitage is one of the world's most famous museums. Inside the Peter and Paul Cathedral lie the tombs of the czars who ruled Russia until the 20th century.<sup>37</sup>

## **Novosibirsk**

Novosibirsk, originally named Novonikolaevsk, lies in south-central Russia on the banks of the Ob River. Novosibirsk began as a small settlement where a Trans-Siberian Railroad bridge was built on the Ob River. From its beginnings as a transportation hub, Novonikolaevsk became a commercial and industrial center. It was one of the first Russian cities to accept the compulsory primary education system implemented in 1913. Russia's civil war tore Novonikolaevsk apart between 1917 and 1919, when the Red and White armies struggled to control the city. Fighting was intense, resulting in substantial casualties and infrastructural damage, including the destruction of the Ob River Bridge. After Lenin's New Economic Policy in 1921, the city began to revive. It was renamed Novosibirsk in 1926, and under Stalin's economic policies, it became one of Siberia's most important industrial centers. As post-Soviet Russia adopted new policies in the 1990s, the city became a gateway into the Siberian market.<sup>38</sup>

## **Nizhniy Novgorod**

Nizhniy Novgorod (formerly Gorky) is located east of Moscow on the banks of the Volga River at its confluence with the Oka River. The city emerged in 1221 as a military fortress to defend against invading tribes. Its strategic location made it an important trading hub, where traders exchanged fish, salt, and goods from the Orient. It was a center of the Orthodox religion. In the 18th century, Nizhniy Novgorod developed into a regional administrative center with medical facilities and cultural institutions, including theaters, schools, and a printing press. Novelist Maxim Gorky was born in the city, and many Russians known for their contributions to the sciences and arts lived there. The city is the home of the annual Makaryev Fair, which attracts travelers worldwide.<sup>39</sup> During the Soviet era, Nizhniy Novgorod became a military production and research base. Today, the city remains a center for industrial activity.<sup>40</sup>

## **Yekaterinburg**

Located in central Russia on the eastern side of the Ural Mountains, Yekaterinburg was founded in 1723 by Peter the Great, who named it after his wife, Empress Catherine I. The city grew into an industrial center, which it remains today. The city's most significant industries include steelmaking, timber processing, pulp and paper production, and chemicals. Yekaterinburg is a center for research with a particular focus on industry. The largest local research facility is the Urals Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and its 18 institutes. Yekaterinburg was the site of the 1918 assassination of Russia's last czar, Nicholas II, and his family by the Bolsheviks of the newly formed Soviet government. The event occurred in the basement of the Ipatiev House, which authorities later tore down and replaced with a church known as the Cathedral-on-the-Blood. Today, the church is a site of pilgrimage.<sup>41</sup>

37 Jeremy Howard, *National Geographic Traveler: St. Petersburg* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2007), 22–37, 48–49.

38 Novosibirsk City Guide, "History," 2008, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.allsiberia.com/novosibirsk/Nskhistory.htm>

39 Lonely Planet, "Russia," 2022, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/russia>

40 Global Security, "Kilo Class," 11 July 2011, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/kilo.htm>

41 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Yekaterinburg," 22 February 2019, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Yekaterinburg>

# History

## **Early History**

Although people have inhabited the territory of modern-day Russia since Paleolithic times, the modern Russian state can only be directly traced back to the ninth century C.E. Kievan Rus, founded in Kyiv (now in Ukraine). Kievan Rus ruled from the 10th to the 12th centuries. Before this time, many distinct tribes had occupied the western region of Russia. During the Kievan Rus era, the ruler Vladimir I instituted Christianity as the state religion, thereby providing the foundation for the later development of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tied to Kievan Rus through the practice of Christianity, Byzantine culture became influential in Russia during this time. Specifically, Byzantine forms appeared and endured in the church and Russian architecture, art, music, and other areas of Russian culture.<sup>42</sup>

## **From Muscovy to the Romanovs**

A series of Mongolian invasions in the 13th century contributed to the decline of Kievan Rus, which internal strife had already begun to fracture. During the Mongolian control and occupation, the principality of Muscovy (later Moscow) rose as a regional power, ultimately consolidating the area that now constitutes European Russia. Muscovy produced a series of influential leaders, including Ivan III (1462–1505), also known as Ivan the Great, who expanded the empire and adopted the title of czar. Following Ivan III and his son, Vasily III, the notorious Ivan IV (1533–1584), also known as Ivan the Terrible, assumed the throne. Muscovy experienced a period of continued territorial expansion and internal strife as Ivan IV consolidated power through brutal methods of conquest and control. In 1613, after the reign of Boris Godunov and the subsequent Time of Troubles, the Romanov dynasty began, lasting more than 300 years until the 1917 revolution.<sup>43</sup>

During his rule from 1682–1725, Romanov ruler Peter the Great used Western models to modernize the Russian state, including its military, government, and education systems.<sup>44</sup> The profound changes made by Peter the Great created a rivalry between the forces of Western reform and nationalist tendencies tied to Slavic identity and tradition. This dichotomy has endured throughout Russia's history, frequently appearing in the country's literature and political thought.<sup>45</sup>

## **Russia as a European Power**

Building upon the successes of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great (reigning from 1762–1796) transformed Russia into a European power. She further expanded the empire by incorporating the territories of Ukraine, Crimea, and a section of Poland. Catherine's policies favored the nobility, and she was an ardent supporter of the arts and education, particularly regarding European tastes. In addition, Catherine engineered a mass relocation of Jewish peoples in Russia, placing them in the Pale of Settlement region, where they were later brutally attacked in pogroms.<sup>46</sup>

42 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Russia," 3 September 2021, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/russia/>

43 Zenon E. Kohut and David M. Goldfrank, "Muscovy," in *Russia: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1998), 12–17, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://countrystudies.us/russia/3.htm>

44 History Learning Site, "Peter the Great," 2013, retrieved on 2 February 2023, [http://www.historylearning-site.co.uk/peter\\_the\\_great.htm](http://www.historylearning-site.co.uk/peter_the_great.htm)

45 Martin McCauley, "Russia: History: The 18th Century," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 22 October 2022, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/History#toc38521>

46 Michael Kort, *A Brief History of Russia* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 62–71.

The 19th and early 20th centuries brought meaningful change to Russia. Under the rule of Alexander I (1801–1825), the government instituted various reforms. The czar later reversed these reforms as he grew more conservative after defeating Napoleon in 1812. In the years following the reign of Alexander I, Russia continued its expansion, incorporating regions of Central Asia, Siberia, and the Caucasus. Some developments from this period signaled positive change, such as the opening of the Pacific port of Vladivostok in 1860 and the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Russian culture made its mark on history during this period. Literary giants such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Pushkin gained international fame, and several other artists, musicians, and literary figures made significant contributions to Russian and world culture.<sup>47</sup>

In other ways, however, Russia could not compete with the West. The nation's economy lacked an industrial base, and unemployment increased as cities grew. As part of a series of reforms, Czar Alexander II (1855–1881) emancipated the serfs (indentured peasants). Revolutionaries assassinated Alexander II in 1881, and his successor, Alexander III, reinstated reactionary policies that allied the czarist government with the nobility. The freed serfs continued to live in impoverished conditions, and riots against the government were common through the turn of the century.<sup>48</sup>

### **Revolution in Russia**

Under Czar Alexander III, the government enacted several counter-reforms in a failed effort to control the restive population. The government monitored the press, prohibited peasant and working-class children from attending secondary school, banned the political activity of university students, and imprisoned or exiled dissenters. After Japan defeated Russia in the unpopular Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the czarist government began its steep decline, partly brought about by the actions of the disaffected working class, peasants, and the educated middle class. Nicholas II, son of Alexander III, was to be the last czar.<sup>49</sup>

The first revolution occurred during the Russo-Japanese War, and widespread strikes followed. In 1905, Czar Nicholas II (1894–1917) was forced to install a constitution and a democratic governing body (known as the Duma), as well as some minor governmental reforms. At the same time, his government suppressed the rebellion and channeled people's anger into pogroms against the Jewish population.<sup>50</sup>

World War I, which the Russian government entered to avoid German domination, signaled the end of the Russian monarchy. Although Russian landowners and nobility supported the war, most peasants and working-class Russians saw it as another hardship. The Russian war effort thus split along class lines as internal dissent against the czar, corruption in the nobility, and widespread poverty reached a critical point. In 1917, a revolution broke out in Saint Petersburg. The army mutinied, and Duma leaders forced Nicholas II to step down. Later that year, the Bolshevik Red Army (communists) seized power and installed a Soviet government. The counterrevolutionary forces, known as the Whites, fought against the newly formed communist government, spawning the Russian Civil War. The Bolsheviks won the civil war, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and formed the Soviet Union in 1922.<sup>51</sup>

47 Michael Kort, *A Brief History of Russia* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 73–77.

48 Richard S. Wortman, "Chapter Two: The Czar-Emancipator," in *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy: Volume Two: From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 58–90.

49 Michael Kort, *A Brief History of Russia* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 107–111.

50 Zenon E. Kohut and David M. Goldfrank, "History: Revolutions and Civil War," in *Russia: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1998), 45–46, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://countrystudies.us/russia/8.htm>

51 Thomas Skallerup and James P. Nichol, "History: Revolutions and Civil War," in *Russia: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1998), 57–58, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://countrystudies.us/russia/8.htm>

## ***The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.)***

After Lenin died in 1924, Josef Stalin became General Secretary of the Communist Party and oversaw the nation until his death in 1953. As dictator, Stalin ruled Russia with complete authority, controlling all aspects of the country's domestic and foreign policy. Under his rule, millions of Russians died in political purges, famines created by the state, and forced coercion into enormous industrial and agricultural collectives. Stalin sent millions of people, including ethnic minorities, writers, scientists, army and party officials, and anyone he perceived as an enemy, to Siberia to live in *gulags* or prison camps.<sup>52</sup>

Although initially allied with Russia, the Axis powers attacked the U.S.S.R. in 1941. The country entered World War II on the Allies' side, losing more than 20 million people in the sustained conflict. After the war ended, the U.S.S.R. joined the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member.<sup>53</sup>

Subsequent Soviet leaders included Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and others, with Mikhail Gorbachev becoming the last Secretary General of Russia's Communist Party. Gorbachev tried to reform the Soviet Union, implementing *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) policies. But the Soviet system was too unwieldy to be reformed and collapsed in 1991, accompanied by Gorbachev's resignation as president. Authorities held free elections, and in 1991, Boris Yeltsin became the Russian Federation's first president. The same year, Russia and most former Soviet Republics reconstituted themselves as the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose confederation of independent countries.<sup>54</sup>

## ***The Russian Federation***

During the 1990s, the newly formed Russian Federation had to negotiate new alliances and manage internal dissent. The Yeltsin government adopted a pro-American foreign policy, which drew opposition from some groups, and it drafted a new constitution, which voters approved. The public also elected a new parliament representing various political parties. In subsequent years, the government strongly opposed the incorporation of Russia's former satellites into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which had previously served as an alliance against the Soviet state. There was also a general sentiment in Russia that the country remained underrepresented in Europe's political bloc. Russia renewed its partnerships with China and a few Middle Eastern countries to extend its reach while remaining committed to international trade and the global economy.<sup>55</sup>

Elected in 2000, Vladimir Putin became Russia's next president, and he rapidly strengthened the central government, asserting dominance over potential separatist republics. Internally, Putin reformed and stabilized the economy. After the September 11th attacks in 2001, Russia's ties with the United States strengthened again, forming the NATO-Russian Council in 2002.<sup>56</sup>

## ***2000-2012***

The Russian people have seen their nation's international influence fluctuate since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia has been granted a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and has gained a voice in NATO. For several years, Russia worked to develop stronger diplomatic relationships and cultural exchanges with the

52 Michael Kort, *A Brief History of Russia* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 172–86.

53 UN Security Council, "Membership since 1946," n.d., retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/security-council-members>

54 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)," 20 September 2022, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-of-Independent-States>

55 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Russia," 3 September 2021, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/russia/>

56 Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "Russia: History: Post-Soviet Russia: The Putin Presidency," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2 October 2022, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/History#toc274471>

European Union (EU), the United States, and Asian countries. The country's trade sector became stronger as its economy expanded, but the global financial crisis that began in 2008 hit the economy hard. Militarily, the government has developed a more mobile and professional army, but progress is limited; Russia's military leaders remain committed to a large nuclear force for self-defense.<sup>57</sup>

Relations between Russia, the European Union, and the United States worsened in 2008 when Russia entered an armed conflict in Georgia. Russia supported the separatist movements in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's intervention on the side of South Ossetia took the fight deep into Georgian territory. Following Russia's recognition of the breakaway republics, relations deteriorated further between Russia and the United States. Relations warmed somewhat when Dmitry Medvedev assumed the presidency in 2008. As a result, cooperation on critical strategic issues, including nuclear arms, increased.<sup>58</sup>

Relations chilled once again when Medvedev stepped down, and Vladimir Putin won his third (nonconsecutive) term as president in the 2012 elections. After that, the Kremlin began to rely increasingly on repression to stifle civil society and critical voices. For example, new legislation restricted educational and cultural exchange programs while designating media outlets and NGOs as "foreign agents." More pervasively, the Russian government began using the so-called "undesirable foreign organization" designation and even the COVID-19 pandemic to justify further restrictions on the Russian people's freedom of expression and assembly.<sup>59</sup>

The Russian government has also used arbitrary designations, criminal convictions, and administrative barriers to disqualify potential opposition candidates, ensuring that no independent voices can participate in government processes. New constitutional amendments approved by the government and endorsed in a nationwide vote in July 2020 provided President Putin the opportunity to remain in power until 2036.<sup>60</sup>

## Recent Events

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a multi-front invasion of neighboring Ukraine, marking the most significant conventional military attack on a European sovereign state since World War II. Despite early gains, Russia's leadership underestimated Ukrainian determination and military capabilities.<sup>61</sup> The invasion faced widespread international condemnation, leading many countries to impose sanctions on Russia while providing humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine. A year later, in February 2023, Russia initiated a full-scale invasion, advancing into northern Ukraine's Chernihiv Oblast, triggering one of Europe's bloodiest conflicts since World War II. As of January 2024, the war continues with no sign of abating anytime soon. Global condemnation has left Putin isolated internationally, pushing Russia towards closer ties with China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>62</sup>

57 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Russia," 3 September 2021, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/russia/>

58 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Russia," 3 September 2021, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/russia/>

59 U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Russia," 3 September 2021, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-russia/>

60 Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber and Alexander Marrow, "Kremlin Calls Vote Allowing Putin to Rule Until 2036 a Triumph as Russians Ponder His Next Move," *Reuters*, 2 July 2020, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-vote/kremlin-calls-vote-allowing-putin-to-rule-until-2036-a-triumph-as-russians-ponder-his-next-move-idUSKBN2431TM>

61 Central Intelligence Agency, "Russia: Introduction: Background," in *The World Factbook*, retrieved on 19 January 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/russia/>

62 Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia," *Council of Foreign Relations*, 14 February 2023, retrieve on 29 January 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/background/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia#:~:text=Russia's%20unprovoked%20invasion%20of%20Ukraine,could%20irreparably%20harm%20their%20relations.>

Amidst a turbulent political landscape, 71-year-old Vladimir Putin has announced his candidacy for Russia's 2024 presidential elections. Having been a central figure in Russian politics since 1999, alternating between prime minister and president, Putin faces a complex situation. Despite a failed coup in 2023 by Yevgeny Prigozhin's paramilitary group, Wagner, which challenged Moscow's authority, Putin maintains significant public support. Recent surveys by the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion show that 78.5% of Russians trust him, with 75.8% approving his actions. A victory in the 2024 election could extend Putin's influence in Russian politics until at least 2030 and possibly up to 2036.<sup>63</sup>

## Government

Russia is a federal republic with most power vested in the president, who has broad authority to issue decrees with the force of law. The president appoints the nation's ministers, including the prime minister. Voters elect presidents for a 6-year term and may reelect them to a second term. In an unprecedented move, Vladimir Putin, who had already served two terms as president, was elected to a third (nonconsecutive term) and is eligible to run for a fourth term. After Putin's second term in office, Dmitry Medvedev served one term before deciding not to run again.<sup>64</sup>

The legislature comprises the more powerful State Duma (the lower house) and the Federation Council (the upper house). Using a popular vote according to a proportional representation scheme, Russians elect all 450 deputies of the State Duma to 5-year terms. Candidates must receive at least 7% of the vote to be eligible. The Federation Council, Russia's upper legislative house, has two senators from each of the 83 regional districts. Provincial legislatures elect one senator, and the provincial governor nominates the second, whom the regional legislature must confirm.<sup>65</sup>

The Russian judicial branch comprises the Constitutional Court, military courts, arbitrage courts, and courts of general jurisdiction. The Constitutional Court rules on disputes between the executive and legislative branches and between the federal and local governments. The court also has jurisdiction over constitutional issues, impeachment proceedings against presidents, and appeals from lower courts. Attempts in recent years to increase the judiciary's autonomy have been unsuccessful. Many sitting judges view their role as protecting the state's interests.<sup>66</sup>

## Media

Russia has a history of suppressing free speech and freedom in the media. The nation received a "not free" rating from both Freedom House (23 / 100 countries) and Reporters Without Borders (155 / 180 countries) in 2022. During Putin's three presidential terms, media freedom has been severely restricted, and independent media has declined. Between 2008 and 2012, the situation improved somewhat under Medvedev's leadership. Still, his departure and Putin's reelection pressured the media to reflect the state's position and avoid criticizing the government.<sup>67</sup> Observers list Russia as a country of concern because of the frequent harassment and prosecution of independent

63 Ruxandra Iordache, "Russia's Vladimir Putin Says He Will Run for President in 2024 Elections: State Media," CNBC, 8 December 2023, retrieved on 29 January 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/12/08/russias-putin-says-he-will-run-for-president-in-2024-state-media.html>

64 Geoffrey Alan Hoskins et al., "Russia: Government and Society: Constitutional Framework," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 14 January 2023, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Government-and-society>

65 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World: Russia," 2021, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2021>

66 BTI Transformation Index, "Russia Country Report 2022: Political Transformation and the Rule of Law," 2022, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/RUS>

67 Kristina Narizhnaya, "Russian Media Under Pressure Ahead of Putin Presidency," *Global Post*, 5 April 2012, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/russia/120402/russian-media-under-pressure-Putin-presidency>

journalists. All media, including major TV networks, remain closely monitored by the government.<sup>68</sup> Due to Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, the internet is even more restricted and censored than in the past, with media users experiencing an uphill struggle against authorities. The government blocks websites and issues censorship orders to companies like Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Google Search, YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram. Furthermore, a 2022 New York Times investigation revealed that Russia's internet censoring also serves as a surveillance mechanism.<sup>69</sup>

Website blocking and censorship focus intensely on content related to religion, ethnicity, and sites critical of the government. Bloggers have also been under pressure to monitor their content, with some bloggers suffering physical attacks or receiving prison sentences. The frequency of attacks on journalists significantly increased after Putin signed a law criminalizing any public opposition or negative media coverage of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. These actions have prompted Reporters Without Borders to place Russia on its "enemies of the internet" watch list.<sup>70</sup>

## Economy

Since 1999, Russia's economy has become more market-based and experienced significant growth due mainly to increased oil and gas production. The economic sector remains dominated by 100–200 large corporations, mainly in the energy and natural resource sector, but there has been a shift toward the service sector in recent years. Small- and medium-sized businesses have increased in recent years, employing approximately 26% of the workforce in 2019.<sup>71</sup>

Improvements in the overall standard of living brought Russians to a level comparable to that in most European nations, although nearly 13% of the population lives below the poverty line. Yet disparities between the rich and poor remain among the nation's most serious issues. The ranks of the middle class have plummeted since 2014 due to the standard of living falling steadily. Unemployment in 2023 is approximately 5.1%, but among those aged 15–24, the rate soars to nearly 17%. The country's highest unemployment rates are in the North Caucasus: Ingushetia (29.3%) and North Ossetia (14.9%). In the country's two major cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, unemployment is negligible (1.8% and 1.1%, respectively).<sup>72</sup>

If Russia's military operations in Ukraine continue, it may see less than 1.3 million births in 2024, the lowest figure recorded over the last decade.<sup>73</sup> Russia's population is also aging, which portends an additional blow to the shortage of workers to fill positions, threatening economic growth unless the trend reverses.<sup>74</sup>

68 Reporters Without Borders, "Russia," 20 January 2023, retrieved on 2 February 2023, <https://rsf.org/en/country/russia>

69 Justin Sherman, "Russia's Internet Censor is Also a Surveillance Machine," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 28 September 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/russias-internet-censor-also-surveillance-machine>

70 Freedom House, "Freedom on the Net: Russia 2022," 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://rsf.org/en/index>

71 Julian Cooper, "The Russian Economy Twenty Years after the End of the Socialist Economic System," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2013), retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366512000206>

72 Caucasus Watch, "Recent Social Research Data Regarding North Caucasus," 11 May 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://caucasuswatch.de/news/5345.html>

73 Statista, "Number of live births in Russia from 2000 to 2022," 18 July 2023, retrieved on 1 February 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1010528/number-of-live-births-in-russia/>

74 World Bank, "Searching for a New Silver Age in Russia: The Drivers and Impacts of Population Aging" (overview report, 2015), 7–27, retrieved on 17 February 2023, [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/09/11/090224b0830cfe5f/1\\_0/Rendered/PDF/Searching0for00ng000overview0report.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/09/11/090224b0830cfe5f/1_0/Rendered/PDF/Searching0for00ng000overview0report.pdf)

## Ethnic Groups

Nearly 200 ethnic groups make up the Russian population. Except for ethnic Russians, who represent 78% of the population, no other group makes up more than 4%. Ethnic Russians, who originated from the East Slavs, are spread throughout the country. Approximately three-quarters of ethnic Russians identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. Ukrainians represent about 1.4% of the population of Russia. Despite the obvious animosity they have displayed toward each other since 2022, they nevertheless share strong historical and cultural ties. Like the Russians, Ukrainians are overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian. They are concentrated in Russia's southwestern border region and live throughout the country.<sup>75</sup>

Tatars are Russia's largest ethnic minority, representing 3.7% of the population. They live primarily in western Russia, in the Volga River and Ural Mountains regions, and descend from early Mongol invaders. The Tatar people are predominately followers of Sunni Islam. They have an uneasy relationship with Moscow based on a long history of Russian oppression. During Stalin's purges, nearly half of the population died from starvation. Tatar society is close-knit with clear leadership, which some see as a political threat to Moscow's rule.<sup>76</sup>

Bashkirs represent 1.1% of the population of Russia. Their homeland is the Republic of Bashkortostan, located southeast of Tatarstan between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains. A Turkic people, they were originally nomadic pastoralists but became settled agriculturalists in the 19th century. By 2016, the village had become a critical element in the social structure of the Bashkirs, who are primarily Muslim or Eastern Orthodox.<sup>77</sup>

The homeland of the Chuvash (1% of the population) is the Chuvash Republic, immediately northwest of Tatarstan. Like the Tatars and Bashkirs, the Chuvash are Turkic-speaking people by origin, but unlike these two groups, the Chuvash are predominantly Orthodox Christian rather than Muslim.<sup>78</sup>

Russia's most fiercely independent ethnic group is the Chechens, most of whom are Muslim and reside in the autonomous republic of Chechnya in the Northern Caucasus. During World War II, Stalin deported all Chechens to Siberia. More than a decade later, the government declared the Chechens rehabilitated and allowed them to resettle in their homeland. Chechnya waged an unsuccessful separatist war with Russia during much of the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>79</sup>

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75 Ukraine.com, "Religions and Churches in Ukraine," 2015, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.ukraine.com/religion/>

76 *Economist*, "Russia and the Tatars: Divide and Digest," 17 September 2014, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2014/09/russia-and-tatars>

77 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Bashkir," 8 February 2016, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bashkir>

78 Central Intelligence Agency, "Russia: People and Society," in *The World Factbook*, retrieved on 08 February 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/russia/#people-and-society>

79 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Chechnya," 3 March 2022, retrieved on 17 February 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Chechnya>

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Profile Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

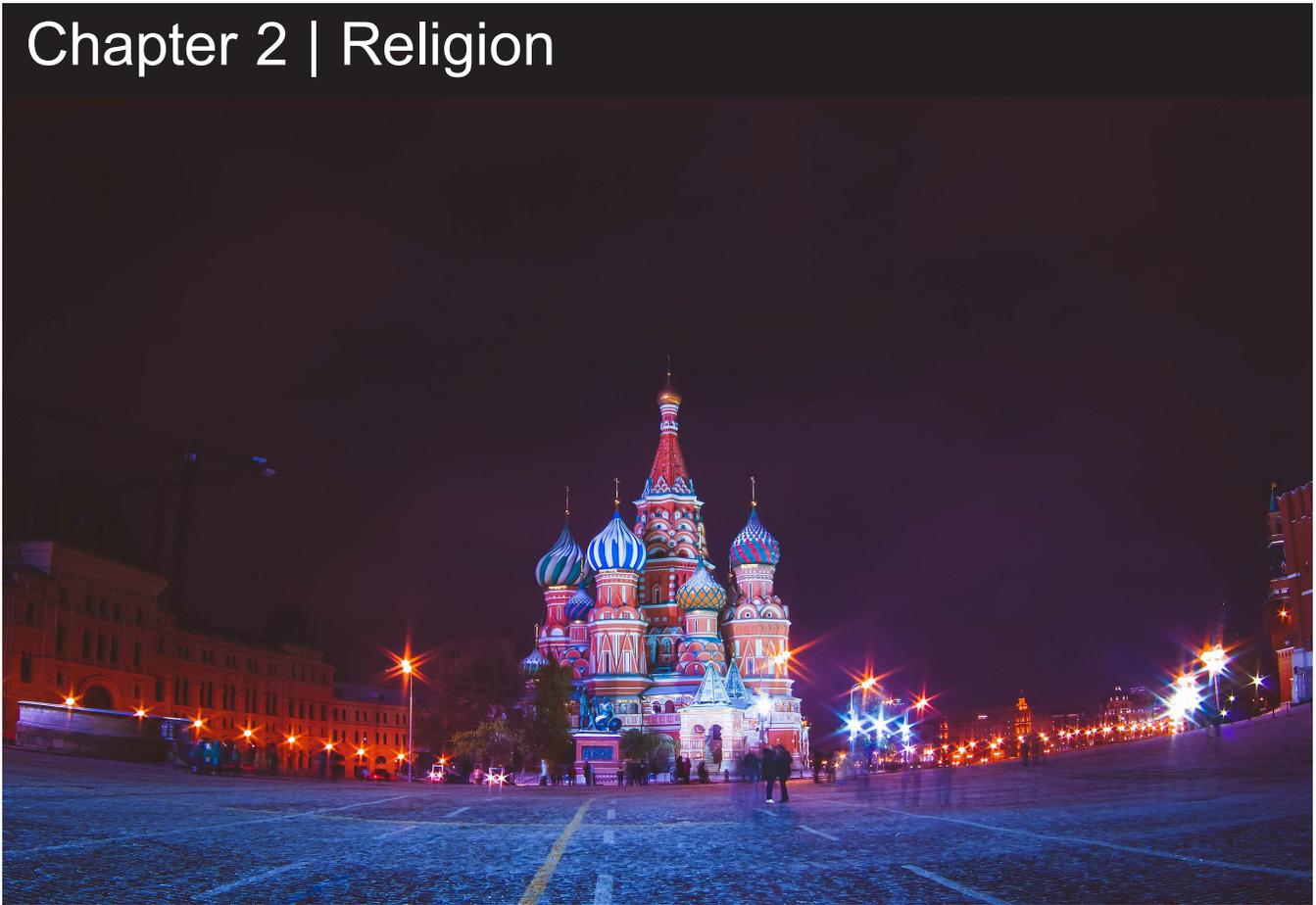
- |    |   |      |       |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Russia is the world's largest country.  | True | False |
| 2. | Moscow and Saint Petersburg are located on the Russian Plain in the European region of the country. | True | False |
| 3. | The Don River flows into the Caspian Sea.   | True | False |
| 4. | The Russian people directly elect all members of the Russian legislature.                           | True | False |
| 5. | Ethnic Russians comprise less than half of the country's population.                                | True | False |

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Profile Assessment Answers

1. True:  
At more than 17 million sq km (6.5 million sq mi) of territory, Russia is the largest country in the world.
2. True:  
Extending over most of European Russia, the Russian Plain is home to several of the nation's major cities, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg.
3. False  
The Don River flows into the Sea of Azov, an arm of the Black Sea.
4. False:  
Provincial legislatures elect half of the upper house members. Provincial governors nominate the other half, whom the regional legislatures must confirm.
5. False:  
Although there are more than 190 ethnic groups in Russia, ethnic Russians comprise 78% of the country's population..

## Chapter 2 | Religion



St. Basil's Cathedral by night  
Wikimedia/Илья Трофимов

### Introduction

Russian Orthodox Christianity is the predominant religion in the Russian Federation. Christianity came to Russia from Byzantium in the 10th century C.E. when missionaries converted Prince Vladimir I. As the leader of Kievan Rus, Vladimir I instituted Christianity as the official state religion, and for the next 1,000 years, the Russian Orthodox Church dominated the religious landscape. Russia's religious climate changed dramatically in 1917 when the Bolsheviks took power. As atheistic communists, the Bolsheviks opposed organized religion and instituted restrictive measures on its practice. Although the Russian Orthodox Church experienced a brief revival during World War II, it was not until the 1980s, when the Gorbachev regime took power, that the government restored tolerance for religious worship. After the Soviet Union dissolved, religious practices became a visible and openly accepted part of life in the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup>

Islam is Russia's second-largest religion and one of several legally recognized religions or alternative belief systems. In 1997, the Russian government officially recognized Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Many practitioners

<sup>1</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, ed., "Society: The Russian Orthodox Church," in *Russia: A Country Study*, edited by Glen E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://countrystudies.us/russia/38.htm>

synthesize aspects of these faiths with elements of various ancient or folk religions, such as animism, shamanism, astrology, witchcraft, New Age views, and others. Many Russians identify as religious but are not active participants in their stated religion, while others are nonreligious or prefer to remain unaffiliated with any organized church or belief system.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian constitution provides for freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and the legal equality of different religions. However, a law passed in 1997 requires a religion to be established for 15 years before it can be officially registered and sanctioned in the country. This law has prevented the Church of Scientology and several other organized belief systems from operating in Russia. Despite the constitution's legal protections, many minority religious groups continue to face discrimination or persecution, with limited prosecution of offending groups or individuals.<sup>3</sup>

## Major Religions in Russia

After 70 years of Soviet rule, most Russians claimed they had either no religion or were non-practicing believers. By 2023, between 15% and 20% of the population claimed they belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, although some estimates suggest the number may now be as high as 43%, making it the nation's largest Christian denomination; between 10% and 15% of the country's population are adherents of Islam, most of whom are Sunni. Russia's Turkic groups, such as the Tatars and Bashkirs, are predominantly Muslim, as are some of the ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus, such as the Chechens. In addition to the Volga-Ural and North Caucasus regions, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and parts of Siberia have significant Muslim populations. Most of Russia's Muslim population is indigenous rather than having migrated to the country.<sup>4</sup>

Russian Jews have undergone several periods of discrimination and repression in both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. During the Gorbachev regime of the 1980s, a reform policy allowing greater freedom for Jews to emigrate to Israel and other countries seriously reduced the Russian Jewish population. As of 2022, observers estimated that between 150,000 and 750,000 Jews live in Russia, mainly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.<sup>5</sup>

About one million Buddhists live in Russia. They live primarily in three southern republics: Tuva and Buryatia, which both lie along the Russian-Mongolian border and Kalmykia, far to the west near the lower reaches of the Volga River.<sup>6</sup>

### Christianity

Most Christians in Russia are followers of the Russian Orthodox Church, which originates in the Byzantine Christianity of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Christian Church, for centuries, had two main centers: Rome and Constantinople. In the 11th century, divisions in how the two centers viewed the

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2 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

3 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

4 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

5 Glen E. Curtis and Marian Leighton, "Judaism," in *Russia: A Country Study*, edited by Glen E. Curtis (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1998), retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://countrystudies.us/russia/41.htm>

6 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved 2 Marcy 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

nature of Christ drove a wedge between them. By 1054, the Roman and Eastern churches split, forming the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

“Orthodox” means “right believing,” and its tradition developed from the faith of the Eastern Roman Empire. Like other Christian faiths, the Russian Orthodox Church believes in the Holy Trinity and the distinct but inseparable divine and human natures of Jesus. The Church recognizes a number of saints, including Mary, the mother of Jesus. The veneration of sacred imagery known as icons and the inclusion of mystical forms of prayer are central features of their practice. The Church has a strong monastic tradition that all members, lay people, and monks should ideally follow the same requirements living their lives according to the teachings of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church represents Russian history and culture for many people throughout the country. Although the Orthodox Church has not regained the vital role it played before communism, it has a growing political presence, and the state has adopted Orthodox holidays.<sup>9</sup>

Russians practice several other Christian denominations, including Roman Catholicism and several Protestant denominations. The government initially excluded some of these in the 1997 law, approving some religions and restricting others based on Russian practices and history. In addition, according to the law, authorities would not allow unrecognized churches to distribute religious materials or operate religious schools. Since then, many Protestant churches have gained full status, and the Catholic Church has established a presence in some areas of the country.<sup>10</sup>

## **Islam**

The earliest Russian converts to Islam in Russia were the Dagestani people, who converted in the middle of the seventh century. In the 15th century, the Russian Empire expanded into traditional Muslim regions, particularly those of the fallen Mongol empire. Today, Islam is Russia’s second-largest religion. Between 10 and 23 million Russian Muslims are concentrated in certain ethnic republics, such as Bashkortostan and Tartarstan, in the Volga River region of western Russia. However, there is a sizeable Muslim population in Moscow as well.<sup>11</sup>

Although scholars identify most of Russia’s Muslims as members of the Sunni sect, Muslims hold a different view. Thirty percent of Russia’s Muslim population identify as Sunnis, while just 6% identify as Shi’a. The largest group (45%) indicates they are “just Muslim” with no preference for one sect over the other.<sup>12</sup>

Islam is monotheistic, meaning its followers profess faith in a single God. In the Muslim community or *ummah*, God is Allah (the Arabic term for God). The Arabic word Islam means “to submit” or “to surrender”; therefore, a Muslim submits to Allah’s will. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. Muslims consider Muhammad to be the last in a long line of prophets that includes Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Esa). In this way,

7 John Garrard and Carol Garrard, “Chapter 5: Irreconcilable Differences: Orthodoxy and the West,” in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 141-180.

8 Kristina Stoeckl, *Community After Totalitarianism: The Russian Orthodox Intellectual Tradition and the Philosophical Discourse of Political Modernity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), 82.

9 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia,” 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

10 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia,” 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

11 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, “International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia,” 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

12 Pew Research Center, “The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity,” *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, 9 August 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-1-religious-affiliation.aspx>

Muslims share some fundamental elements of the Judaic and Christian traditions. One significant difference is that Muslims consider the message relayed by Muhammad to be God's final and definitive revelation to humankind. The message relayed by Muhammad constitutes the *Quran*, the sacred scripture of Islam. Additional holy texts include the *Hadith*, a collection of Muhammad's sayings, and the *Sunnah*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.<sup>13</sup>

The essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith are encapsulated in the five pillars of Islam. The first foundational pillar is the sincere recitation of the *shahada* or Islamic creed: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." The remaining pillars include the performance of ritual prayers five times a day; the giving of alms to the poor and needy (traditionally given through taxes on income); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and undertaking a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, to perform religious rituals. Muslims believe that Allah will judge them for their actions on earth, which will result in spending their afterlife in either heaven or hell.<sup>14</sup>

## Religion and the Russian Government

Russia is a secular state with a constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion and equality of all faiths. Although Russians generally respect rights relating to freedom of religion, members of religious minorities often face restrictions and discrimination. In addition, the state repeatedly violates constitutional guarantees of equality of all faiths. The state continues to exercise some measure of control over Russia's churches. The Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church established a collaborative relationship with the KGB and the Kremlin during the Soviet era. The ongoing repercussions of this relationship have caused tension between detractors and advocates of Russia's current church-state relationship, which is relatively close.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, the two institutions have sought mutual support, with the Russian government embracing the Orthodox Church as an essential element of Russian identity, values, and culture. The Russian Orthodox Church, of which President Putin is a member, enjoys a special relationship with government officials, which gives them greater access to many public institutions, including schools and hospitals.<sup>16</sup>

In 2002, the country passed a law designed to counter extremist activities. Authorities may charge individuals and groups with extremism, ban publications, and imprison or fine those disseminating materials promoting such positions. Although the government does not mandate religious instruction in schools, it does permit such instruction. In addition, the government banned some Islamist religious organizations due to their extremist ideologies. The Ministry of Justice also oversees religious curricula to guard against religious extremism.<sup>17</sup>

13 Clyde Mark, "CRS Report: Islam: A Primer," Congressional Research Service, Federation of American Scientists, 19 February 2003, 27 February 2023, <https://www.fas.org/spp/crs/misc/RS21432.pdf>

14 Clyde Mark, "CRS Report: Islam: A Primer," Congressional Research Service, Federation of American Scientists, 19 February 2003, 27 February 2023, <https://www.fas.org/spp/crs/misc/RS21432.pdf>

15 Engjellushe Morina and Andrew Wilson, "Russia, Ukraine, and the Orthodox Church: Where Religion Meets Geopolitics and War," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 23 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/russia-ukraine-and-the-orthodox-church-where-religion-meets-geopolitics-and-war/>

16 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

17 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

## Religion and Daily Life

Observers have historically considered Russians religious, which was once evident in virtually every aspect of daily life. However, Russians have never had a tradition of Sunday church attendance as a social outing, so when Russian Christians went to church on Sundays, it was often to pray alone.<sup>18</sup>

Although there has been a resurgence in religious beliefs in Russia, a commensurate growth in church attendance has not accompanied it. Most continue to live relatively secular lives. Despite low rates of church attendance, however, evidence of religion's impact on daily life is apparent. Russian fatalism and passivity are deeply rooted in religious teachings, and Easter is the leading Christian holiday (not Christmas) since it celebrates the triumph of life over death. Another deeply held religious belief among Russians is that life is short, and accumulating material goods is not as crucial as maintaining spiritual balance. Thus, Russians appear willing to endure the hardships and trials of everyday life in exchange for a better life in the afterlife.<sup>19</sup>

Elements of many of Russia's pagan traditions are also visible. Some of the largest pagan festivals merged with Christian celebrations, such as the pagan summer fest that integrated with Christian Whitsunday celebrations. During this celebration, worshippers decorate churches with birch branches which they tie threads on while making wishes. The tradition of "parents' Saturdays" reflects the belief in ancestor worship, and Russian funerals are often reminiscent of pagan funeral traditions. The growing popularity of fortunetellers and faith healers can be linked to a deep and abiding religious tradition.<sup>20</sup>

Muslims celebrate traditional religious holidays and fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Conservative dress codes have also become more popular, including wearing the hijab. In 2023, Chechnyan authorities continue to bar women without hijabs from entering state buildings, which violates Russian law.<sup>21</sup>

## Religious Events and Holidays

Russians celebrate various holidays but only observe Orthodox Christmas as a national holiday. Regional governments in predominantly Muslim parts of the country recognize several Islamic holy days as holidays.<sup>22</sup>

Russians celebrate Orthodox Christmas on 7 January during the New Year Holiday Week. For its observers, they celebrate by honoring and praising Jesus Christ in Christian church services throughout the country. Russians generally emphasize the religious nature of the day, and gift-giving is less common.<sup>23</sup>

Easter (Pashka) is the most significant religious holiday for Orthodox Christians in Russia, but it is not a national holiday. Russians celebrate Easter in the latter part of April or the first part of May. The date changes from year to year, and it usually falls later than the same celebration in the U.S. Celebrations start before Easter with Pancake Week

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18 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 68.

19 Anna Pavlovshaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 64-65.

20 Anna Pavlovshaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 65.

21 "Chechnya Women's Islamic Dress Code: Russia Blamed," *BBC News*, 10 March 2011, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12705300>

22 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2021: Russia," 2 June 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>

23 Mariana Beliyeva, et al., *Christmas in Russia* (Chicago: World Book, 2001).

and come just before Lent. Following Lent, many observant Orthodox Christians fast for seven weeks, abstaining from meat and dairy products. They break their fast on the Thursday before Easter. Those who observe the holiday attend church services to worship and reflect on their religious faith. Coloring Easter eggs and sharing a special meal with family and friends is common. On Easter morning, people greet each other with the phrase, “Christ has arisen!” and kiss each other three times on the cheeks.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the holy month of Ramadan, when devout Muslims fast, Russian Muslims celebrate two other major holidays. The first is *Uraza Bayram (Eid al-Fitr)*, which comes at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. The second is *Kurban Bayram (Eid al-Adha)*, which is at the end of the hajj and commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son.<sup>25</sup>

## Buildings of Worship

### *Russian Orthodox Churches*

Orthodox Christians worship in churches. The Russian churches have a unique architectural style characterized by verticality, bright colors, and multiple domes. Elaborate artwork and icons often decorate Orthodox churches. Each icon has a traditional place in the church. The central piece of any Orthodox church is the icon stand, located at the eastern end separating the main section of the church from the sanctuary. This area is off-limits to everyone except the priest.<sup>26</sup>

Small wooden churches are typical in the countryside. Although these churches are simple in some respects, many have complex features such as onion domes, a Byzantine design that symbolizes heaven according to Orthodox belief. Several of these small-scale wooden churches are on the island of Kizhi (near Saint Petersburg), where settlements were built as early as the 14th century. The government officially designated the Kizhi settlement as an open-air museum in 1960 to preserve its unique wooden architecture.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the most famous Russian church is St. Basil’s Cathedral on Red Square. Russians built the church, with its multiple brightly colored domes, in the 16th century, and it remains a symbol of the deep spirituality of the Russian people.<sup>28</sup>

### *Mosques*

Russia’s Muslims worship in mosques. There are approximately 2,000 Muslim mosques or parishes in Russia. However, Moscow, home to one of the largest Muslim communities in Europe, has only four mosques. The largest mosque in Russia and Europe is the Central Dome Mosque in Grozny, Chechnya. With its 62 m (200 ft) tall minarets, the building can accommodate 10,000 worshippers. The nation’s second-largest mosque is the Qol

24 Anna Pavlovshaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 208-209.

25 Vusala Abbasova, “Muslims in Russia Celebrate Eid al-Adha,” *Caspian News*, 10 July 2022, retrieved on 27 February 2023, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/muslims-in-russia-celebrate-eid-al-adha-2022-7-10-0/>

26 Simon Richmond, *Russia*, 5th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet, 2011), 79.

27 Fedorova Marina Yurievna, “Tourism Development in the Republic of Karelia: Problems and Perspectives,” in *Book of Proceedings of the International Conference on Tourism & Management Studies* (Olhão, Portugal: University of the Algarve, 2011), 60-69, retrieved on 2 March 2023, <http://www.tmsstudies.net/index.php/ectms/article/view/179/215>

28 Sydney Schultze, *Culture and Customs of Russia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 142-143.

Sharif Mosque in Kazan, in the Russian republic of Tatarstan. Finally, another of the largest European mosques is in St Petersburg. With room for 5,000 worshippers, its azure-colored dome is easily distinguishable.<sup>29</sup>

Russian mosques vary in architectural design; however, the interiors of most mosques are similar in structure. At the entrance is a place to leave one's shoes and often a ritual washing station. The main hall is a large empty space. There are no pictures or statues of the human form or Allah. Worshippers sit on the floor. In the qibla wall is a niche called a mihrab, which faces Mecca. There is usually a stepped platform to one side of the *mihrab* where the imam stands.<sup>30</sup>

## Behavior in Places of Worship

### Orthodox Churches

Most Orthodox churches are open to visitors. Russian Orthodox churches symbolize Russia's religious and cultural background, and one should treat them respectfully. Likewise, images of Christ are sacred to Russian Orthodox Christians, and one should approach them quietly and respectfully. The veneration of icons is traditional in most Orthodox churches. Many Russians will respectfully kiss the icon (though never on the face). Worshippers typically stand throughout their entire religious service, lasting several hours. During services, men stand on the right and women on the left.<sup>31</sup>

#### Exchange 1: May I enter the church?

Soldier:	May I enter the church?	mozhna mnye voytee v tseRkaf?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 1

Men should remove their hats upon entering the church, and women should cover their heads with a scarf. Clothing should be modest. Appropriate dress includes clean shirts and pants for men and long skirts or pants with blouses or sweaters for women. Shorts, tight dresses, and short skirts are not appropriate attire. Some churches may turn women wearing pants away, but many will allow such clothing if they are clean, neat, and not revealing. Clothing with images or writing is generally inappropriate.<sup>32</sup>

### Other Christian Churches

Catholic churches generally welcome visitors. Most Catholic women wear a chapel veil in church. Even though visitors may simply be touring the church building, Catholics expect visitors to show respect. Avoid eating, chewing gum, or smoking inside a church building or cathedral. Turn off cell phones. Wear clothing that is modest, clean, and neat. Most Catholic visitors will bless themselves with holy water and make the sign of the cross upon entering

29 Culture Trip, "The Most Beautiful Mosques in Russia," n.d., retrieved on 3 March 2023, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/russia/articles/the-most-beautiful-mosques-in-russia/>

30 Kendra Weisbin, "Introduction to Mosque Architecture," *Khan Academy* n.d., retrieved on 3 March 2023, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/introduction-cultures-religions-apah/islam-apah/a/introduction-to-mosque-architecture#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20most%20visible.pencil%20minarets%20of%20Ottoman%20Turkey>

31 Sergei Sveshnikov, "On Church Etiquette," *Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov (blog)*, 10 December 2009, retrieved on 3 March 2023, <http://frsergei.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/on-church-etiquette/>

32 Sergei Sveshnikov, "On Church Etiquette," *Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov (blog)*, 10 December 2009, retrieved on 3 March 2023, <http://frsergei.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/on-church-etiquette/>

the church, although this is optional, and non-Catholics are not obligated to do so. If attending a mass, Protestants should not participate in the communion service, known as the Eucharist.<sup>33</sup>

### Exchange 2: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	mnye noozhna pakRyt golavoo?
Local:	Yes.	Nyet

*Exchange 2*

Similar rules apply to Protestant churches. Visitors should dress conservatively. Women should avoid tank tops and tight-fitting clothing. Men should remove their hats. Visitors should be silent and respectful, especially during mass, and turn off all cell phones.<sup>34</sup>

Visitors should pay attention to their body language. Remember that crossed arms or hands placed in pockets are mostly considered inappropriate. Visitors should not take photographs inside or outside places of worship without permission.<sup>35</sup>

## Mosques

Some mosques in Russia allow non-Muslims to enter, but visitors should ask if they are permitted. Before entering a mosque, it is imperative to remove one's shoes. Several other rules generally apply to visiting mosques. Be sure to ask a local if there are any specific requirements. Clothing should be conservative and clean. Women should avoid tight-fitting or short-sleeved shirts or blouses and wear a scarf to cover their hair. Men should wear long pants and shirts with sleeves. T-shirts are generally inappropriate. Do not be alarmed or offended if someone disapproves of your clothing and asks you to cover up or leave. It is not acceptable for visitors to enter the mosque when others are guiding communal prayers.<sup>36</sup>

Once inside, the basic rules of etiquette for attending most religious or sacred institutions apply: speak softly and respectfully and do not disturb those at prayer. Do not walk in front of someone praying, as this will invalidate the person's prayer. Instead, kneel, or sit with legs crossed or folded to one side. Do not sit with your legs outstretched or your feet facing Mecca since Muslims consider this unacceptable and highly insulting.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Sacred Heart Catholic Church, "Mass Etiquette," n.d., retrieved 3 March 2023, <https://sacredheartoak.org/mass-etiquette>

<sup>34</sup> Catholic Aptitude, "Beyond "Silent" Mode: Etiquette for Using Your cell Phone in Church," 18 March 2014, retrieved 3 March 2023, <https://catholicapptitude.org/2014/03/18/beyond-silent-mode-etiquette-for-using-your-cell-phone-in-church/>

<sup>35</sup> Simon Richmond, *Russia, 5th ed.* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet, 2011), 80.

<sup>36</sup> Huda, "Etiquette Tips for Visiting a Mosque as a Non-Muslim: Etiquette of Visiting a Mosque as a Non-Muslim," Learn Religions, 4 February 2014, retrieved on 3 March 2023, <https://www.learnreligions.com/etiquette-of-visiting-a-mosque-2004463>

<sup>37</sup> Bryan Carey, "How to Visit Your Local Mosque," Peace Catalyst International, n.d., retrieved on 3 March 2023, <https://www.peacecatalyst.org/blog/2017/8/29/how-to-visit-your-local-mosque>

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Religion Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Christianity spread to Russia in the 17th century, during the reign of Peter the Great.  | True | False |
| 2. | The Russian Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and the legal equality of all faiths. | True | False |
| 3. | Islam is the second-largest religion in Russia.  | True | False |
| 4. | Religious practice has revived in Russia since the end of the communist era.   | True | False |
| 5. | The federal government recognizes both Christian and Islamic holidays.   | True | False |

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Religion Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Christianity has been practiced in Russia since the 10th century when Vladimir I instituted the Christian faith as the state religion. .
2. True:  
Despite these constitutional protections, many minority religious groups face discrimination or persecution in Russia.
3. True:  
Russia's Muslim community is the country's second-largest religious community after the Russian Orthodox Church.
4. True:  
After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, religious practice once again became a visible and openly accepted part of life.
5. False:  
Russians celebrate various holidays but only observe Orthodox Christmas as a national holiday.

# Chapter 3 | Traditions



The Gzhel Russian folk dance ensemble  
Wikimedia/Ari1888

## Introduction

Russian society is a complex mix of native Slavic traditions and foreign influence. The country has not only experienced earth-shaking events that have redefined its cultural and social landscape, the country's vastness and harsh climate have helped to create its unique character, which tends towards collectivism. Individual goals are subordinate to those of the family and nation, so it is unacceptable to tout personal achievements publicly. Consequently, personal relationships are essential and carefully cultivated. Russians often leave room for alternatives when making plans, a trait born from the long history of turmoil, change, and a sense that one can never know or control the future. The truth is, therefore, often relative, giving Russians a solid ability to adapt to change and the realities of life. Communism attempted to change the overall Russian character by imposing more formal, precise, and reserved interactions among people. The imposition of such centralized control thwarted long-held collective values centered on helping neighbors and valuing social networks above the individual. With the fall of communism, however, traditional cultural behaviors have returned.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

- 1 Geoffrey Alan Hosking et al., "Russia: Cultural Life, The Development of Russian Culture" *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 7 March 2023, retrieved on 3 March 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Cultural-life#toc38628>
- 2 Hofstede Insights, "What About Russia," n.d., retrieved on 3 March 2023, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/russia/>
- 3 Zhuo Na, "Research on Russian National Character," *International Education Studies* 1, no. 2 (May 2008): 22–23, retrieved on 4 March 2023, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1057992.pdf>

## Honor and Values

Russia's harsh climate and the vast distances between population centers traditionally meant that Russians had to rely on one another in times of need. As a result, they spend much time visiting, socializing, and maintaining friendships.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Nevertheless, visitors may notice that Russians are quiet and reserved around strangers. In contrast to Western cultural norms, Russians typically save smiles for those closest to them and do not smile at strangers without reason.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, years of autocratic rule before and during communism created deep pessimism about the future in the Russian people.<sup>8</sup>

For centuries, Russians lived in communes where they did not find support and protection; within the commune, the group resolved its issues or problems. Although communes have disappeared in modern Russia, collectivism is still highly valued over individualism. Without prompting, Russians help each other navigate the roadblocks or offer advice to strangers.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Russians are keenly aware of the incredible sacrifices their country and people made during WWII. As a result, they hold war veterans in high regard. Many veterans wear their medals and commendations publicly, particularly on national holidays. Russians take pride in their heritage, wanting others to recognize the country's contributions to world literature, art, medicine, and science.<sup>11, 12, 13, 14</sup>

## Codes of Politeness

Russians typically greet foreigners with a firm handshake and make direct eye contact. Russians may consider it evasive or rude to break off eye contact too soon. On the other hand, when a man first meets a single woman, he should avoid making prolonged or overly direct eye contact with her. When a man shakes hands with a woman, the handshake should be less firm than with a man.<sup>15, 16</sup>

Even if it is cold, one should remove gloves before shaking hands. Many Russians hesitate to shake hands over the threshold of an open door because they consider it bad luck. Embracing or kissing on the cheek is unacceptable except among family members or close friends.<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>

4 Jane Hutchings, ed., *Insight Guides: Russia, Belarus and Ukraine* (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH and Co., 2005), 65–66.

5 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011) 113–115.

6 A. Gologina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 418.

7 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 16.

8 ProQuest CultureGrams World Online Edition, "Russia: General Attitudes," 2015.

9 Jane Hutchings, ed., *Insight Guides: Russia, Belarus and Ukraine* (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH and Co., 2005), 65–66.

10 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 102–104, 113–15.

11 Simon Richmond et al., *Lonely Planet: Russia*, 5th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 100–111.

12 ProQuest CultureGrams World Online Edition, "Russia: General Attitudes," 2015.

13 A. Gologina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 418.

14 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 112–13.

15 Commiseo, "Russia: Language, Culture, and Business Practices," n.d., retrieved on 4 March 2023, <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/russia-guide>

16 Expatica, "Russian Etiquette and Cultural Values," 13 February 2023, retrieved on 4 March 2023, <https://www.expatica.com/ru/living/integration/russian-etiquette-106460/>

17 ProQuest, "Russia: Greetings," *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023, retrieved on 4 March 2023, [https://online.culturegrams.com/world/world\\_country\\_sections.php?cid=132&cn=Russia&sname=Greetings&snid=8](https://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?cid=132&cn=Russia&sname=Greetings&snid=8)

18 Culture Crossing Guide, "Russia: Greetings," 2017, retrieved on 4 March 2023, [http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?id=7&CID=171](http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=7&CID=171)

19 Father Sergio, "Traditions and Superstitions in Russia," blog, 5 January 2008, <https://fathersergio.wordpress.com/2008/01/05/traditions-and-superstitions-in-russia/>

**Exchange 3: Good morning.**

Soldier:	Good morning.	dobRaay ootRa
Local:	Good morning.	dobRaay ootRa

Exchange 3

Russians consider it proper to address people with titles such as *Gospodin* (Mr.) or *Gospozha* (Mrs.), followed by the person's last name.<sup>20, 21</sup> In formal situations, such as at work or when addressing an older person, Russians often use the first two parts of a person's name: first name, middle or patronymic name, often omitting the last name. For example, the name *Anastas Arkadyevich Oblonsky* indicates that *Anastas* is the son of *Arkady* (*evich* which is the masculine form of *child of*) in the *Oblonsky* family. Only close friends use first names alone.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, they may use the first name and the patronymic, such as *Anna Arkadyevana* (*evana* which is the feminine form of *child of*).<sup>23</sup>

**Exchange 4: Hello, Mr. Smirnov.**

Soldier:	Hello, Mr. Smirnov	zdRaavstvooytye, gaspaadeen smeeRnof
Local:	Hello	zdRaavstvooytye!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	oo vaas fsyo f-paRyaadkye?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 4 |

Avoid crossing your arms over your chest or placing your hands in your pockets when speaking; Russians consider this rude, especially when conversing with an older person.<sup>24</sup>

Russians frequently express strong opinions openly. Nevertheless, as a guest in Russia, it is best to avoid criticizing the country, Russian culture, or anything controversial that may be taking place.<sup>25</sup> Personal space in Russia is similar to that in the United States. Speakers typically stand about an arm's length apart. Touching during conversations is relatively uncommon except among family members or close friends.<sup>26</sup>

## Male/Female Interaction

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the communists declared women “free” and gave them the same rights and responsibilities as men. During the Soviet era, the government expected women to fight alongside men on battlefields, work in the nation's factories, and have babies who would become future soldiers. However, underlying

20 Culture Crossing Guide, “Russia: Greetings,” 2017, [http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?id=7&CID=171](http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=7&CID=171)

21 ProQuest CultureGrams World Online Edition, “Russia: Greetings,” 2015.

22 ProQuest, “Russia: Greetings,” *CultureGrams Online Edition, 2023*, retrieved on 4 March 2023, [https://online.culturegrams.com/world/world\\_country\\_sections.php?cid=132&cn=Russia&sname=Greetings&snid=8](https://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?cid=132&cn=Russia&sname=Greetings&snid=8)

23 John Melnyk, “The Ultimate Guide to Russian Names for Russian Language Learners,” blog, 9 July 2021, retrieved on 4 March 2023, <https://speechling.com/blog/the-ultimate-guide-to-russian-names-for-russian-language-learners/>

24 Nina Evason, “Russian Culture: Basic Etiquette,” Cultural Atlas, 2017, retrieved on 4 March 2023, <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/russian-culture/russian-culture-etiquette>

25 Dmitry Paranyushkin, “Russian Customs and Traditions,” Way to Russia, 21 September 2022, retrieved on 4 March 2023, <http://www.waytorussia.net/Practicalities/Traditions.html>

26 Culture Crossing Guide, “Russia: Greetings,” 2017, [http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?id=7&CID=171](http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=7&CID=171)

this apparent equality were Russia's strong patriarchal and conservative values, which are experiencing a revival. Today Russian men are more likely to view women as wives and mothers than as friends and equals.<sup>27, 28, 29, 30, 31</sup>

These patriarchal values are conveyed in the Russian terms *жениться* (*zhenitsa*), meaning "take a wife," and *выходить замуж* (*vykudit zamuzh*), meaning "go after/behind your husband." Both men and women embracing the roles of strong man/weak woman in public convey these values. For example, men routinely open doors for women, give up their seats on buses and trains, help a woman on and off with her coat, and so on. At the same time, it is somewhat common to see men flirting with women and patronizing them in business situations.<sup>32</sup>

There is a general expectation that women will become wives and mothers, caring for children and being responsible for the household.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, women are more likely to live in poverty and face discrimination in the workforce, despite generally higher educational levels. Women make less money, and although unemployment rates are about the same across genders, women are more likely to be under-employed.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps because of their responsibilities as mothers, women have more robust and broader social networks than men.<sup>35, 36</sup>

## Hospitality and Gift Giving

### Gift Giving

One should consider it an honor to be invited to a Russian home; thus, one should accept an invitation to someone's home for food or drinks. Guests should acknowledge this honor by being on time (no more than 15 minutes late) and displaying good manners. Dress should be somewhat formal to show respect for the host. Guests should remove their shoes before entering the home. Hosts commonly offer guests some refreshments; however, it is appropriate to politely refuse this offer if it is unwanted.<sup>37, 38</sup>

It is customary to bring a gift when invited to a Russian home. Males are generally expected to bring flowers; however, they should not bring yellow flowers (a symbol of bad luck). Always give an odd number of flowers because an even number is only for somber occasions, such as funerals. Other suitable gifts include tea, chocolates or other sweets, coffee, or a bottle of wine. It is best to avoid giving a bottle of vodka because once opened, Russians

27 A. Gologina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 423.

28 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 122–23.

29 Jane Hutchings, ed., *Insight Guides: Russia, Belarus and Ukraine* (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH and Co., 2005), 75–77.

30 Nicola-Ann Hardwick, "Reviewing the Changing Situation of Women in Russian Society," E-International Relations, 20 December 2014, <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/12/20/reviewing-the-changing-situation-of-women-in-russian-society/>

31 Amie Ferris-Rotman, "Putin's War on Women," Foreign Policy magazine, 9 April 2018, retrieved on 4 March 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/09/putins-war-on-women/>

32 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 122–24.

33 Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Russian Federation: Discriminatory Family Code," 2019, retrieved on 9 March 2023, <https://www.genderindex.org/methodology/>

34 Francesca Ebel, "In Russia, Gender Equality Still a Long Way Off," AP News, 8 March 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-europe-russia-ap-top-news-70499d77d5bd4ea3b4462d32907420d4>

35 A. Gologina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 423.

36 Jane Hutchings, ed., *Insight Guides: Russia, Belarus and Ukraine* (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH and Co., 2005), 77.

37 ProQuest, "Russian Federation: Visiting," *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

38 Lisa Parris, "Russian Food Etiquette," *USA Today*, 6 April 2023, retrieved on 6 April 2023, <http://traveltips.usatoday.com/russian-food-etiquette-15140.html>

often feel obligated to finish it.<sup>39, 40</sup> It is always appropriate to bring a small gift, such as candy, for a child. Although Russians commonly decline the initial offer of a gift, offer it again and point out that it is “just a little something.”<sup>41, 42</sup>

#### Exchange 5: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	eta padaaRak dlyaa vaas
Local:	I cannot accept this.	yaa nye magoo eta pReenyaat

Exchange 5

If your hostess is pregnant, do not offer her a gift for the baby. It is customary to wait until after a baby is born before bringing a gift. To do otherwise may be considered bad luck for the family.<sup>43</sup>

### Table Manners

Russians are gracious and generous hosts who generally offer an abundance of food. Guests should always leave something on their plates to indicate they have eaten well. If guests clean their plates, it may signify to the host that they did not get enough to eat. Guests should offer to help prepare a meal or clean up afterward. Although the offer may be refused, a reply of “Are you sure?” from the hostess signifies that she would like to accept the offer.<sup>44</sup>

#### Exchange 6: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	yaa tsenyoo vaashye gastyepReemstva
Local:	It is nothing.	nye stooeet blagadaaRnastee

Exchange 6

If you must refuse an alcoholic beverage, give a suitable reason, such as health or religious restrictions that prevent you from accepting it.<sup>45</sup>

#### Exchange 7: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	kak nazvyfaayetsyaa eta blyooda?
Local:	This is borscht.	eta boRshcht

Exchange 7

In Russian homes, seating arrangements are usually made in advance. Commonly, the most honored person sits at the head of the table. The most important guest sits immediately to the host’s right (women sit to the host’s right while men are seated to the hostess’s right).<sup>46</sup> The oldest (or most honored) guest is served first. Guests should not begin eating until after their host has already started. Guests should also avoid putting their elbows on the table

39 Culture Crossing Guide, “Russia: Gift Giving,” 2017, retrieved on 6 April 2023, [http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?id=23&CID=171](http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=23&CID=171)

40 “Food Etiquette and Meal Traditions,” The Mendeleyev Journal, n.d., retrieved on 6 April 2023, <https://russianreport.wordpress.com/russian-cuisine-main-salads-soups-desserts/meal-traditions-and-etiquette/>

41 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 181.

42 56th Parallel, “A guide to: Russian Traditions, Culture, Customs & Etiquette,” accessed 2 February 2024, <https://www.56thparallel.com/russian-traditions/>

43 Jennifer Monaghan, “11 Russian Superstitions (Because We Were Scared to Do 13),” *The Moscow Times*, 9 June 2015, retrieved on 6 April 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/09/11-russian-superstitions-because-we-were-scared-to-do-13-a47241>

44 ProQuest, “Russian Federation: Eating,” *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

45 Elena Krivovoyaz, “You’re Invited!” *Passport Moscow*, 2012, retrieved on 6 May 2023, <http://www.passportmagazine.ru/article/1649/>

46 Etiquette Scholar, “Russian Etiquette,” 2019, retrieved on 6 April 2023, [http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining\\_etiquette/table-etiquette/europe-e\\_dinner\\_etiquette/russian.html](http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/table-etiquette/europe-e_dinner_etiquette/russian.html)

and remain seated until the host gets up to leave the table. Men should pour drinks for women seated next to them. Finally, guests should always compliment the host or hostess on the quality of the food.<sup>47</sup>

#### Exchange 8: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	eta oachyen fkoosnoye blyooda
Local:	It's pelmeni.	eta pyelmyenee

Exchange 8

## Eating Customs and Types of Food

### *Eating Customs and Etiquette*

Russian table manners are casual, and there are few strict rules. Russians use continental table manners, meaning they hold the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating. Russians often use bread to soak up sauce or gravy. Keep one's hands above the table rather than in one's lap. Resting one's wrists, not elbows, on the table is appropriate.<sup>48</sup> Place the knife and fork horizontally across the plate facing to the left to indicate you have finished eating.<sup>49</sup>

### *Meals and Food*

Russians eat three meals a day. Breakfast (*zavtrak*) is usually eaten between 6:00–7:30 a.m. It may include tea, bread, or something more substantial, such as buckwheat pancakes (*kasha*) or porridge with cheese and sour cream. Many Russians eat a snack later in the morning. Lunch is served in the afternoon between 1–2 p.m. Although this afternoon meal was traditionally the largest, nowadays lunches are mostly light meals consisting of soup or salad. The evening meal (*uzhin*) is frequently the day's main meal, and urban Russians may eat this after 8:00 p.m. On formal occasions, the first course might be appetizers (*zakuski*), possibly caviar, chilled meats, hard-boiled eggs, or salted fish. This meal might also start with *borsht*, a popular beet soup cooked in broth with sour cream on the side. The main course generally includes meat. Sour cream is a common ingredient used in cooking. Many are fond of the well-known biftroganov, which consists of beef slices served over noodles in a sour cream sauce.<sup>50, 51</sup>

#### Exchange 9: What ingredients are used to make borscht?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make borscht?	eez kakeeKh pRadooktaf pReegatovlyen boRshcht?
Local:	Red beetroot, cabbage, carrots, potatoes, onions, and beef.	svyokla, kaapoosta, maRkof, kaaRtoshka, look, ee myaasa gavyaadeeny

Exchange 9

Most meals include some type of bread, a Russian specialty, made in different ways. In addition to traditional brown bread, popular varieties include *oladi* (resembling a pancake), *shangi* (white bread rolls), *pyshiki* (small

47 Cayla Dowd, "Russian Food Etiquette" in *A Guide to Russian Food – What to Eat in Russia*, 28 December 2023, <https://www.touristsecrets.com/destinations/asia/russia/a-guide-to-russian-food-what-to-eat-in-russia/>

48 ProQuest, "Russian Federation: Eating," *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

49 Etiquette Scholar, "Russian Etiquette," 2019, retrieved on 6 April 2023, [http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining\\_etiquette/table-etiquette/europe-e\\_dinner\\_etiquette/russian.html](http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/table-etiquette/europe-e_dinner_etiquette/russian.html)

50 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 174–76.

51 "Food Etiquette and Meal Traditions," *The Mendeleev Journal*, n.d., retrieved on 6 April 2023, <https://russianreport.wordpress.com/russian-cuisine-main-salads-soups-desserts/meal-traditions-and-etiquette/>

doughnuts), *baranki* (similar to bagels), and *kalachi* (Russian white bread). Russians may also serve beer or vodka in the evening.<sup>52, 53</sup>

Traditional Russian vodka was made from rye, but now it is usually made from wheat. It is world-famous and includes many varieties. Vodka, meaning “little water” or “dear water,” was called “bread wine” in the past and is alternately glorified as the basis of camaraderie and fine dining with caviar and condemned as the cause of Russia’s high rates of alcoholism. Nevertheless, vodka is often considered a characteristic part of Russian culture. Whether one gulps it to avoid its taste or sips it to savor its fine quality, snacks immediately follow vodka.<sup>54</sup>

## Dress Codes

Russians wear contemporary European clothing and appear neat and well-dressed in public. Among some women, wearing the latest fashions is essential.<sup>55</sup> Usually, Russian dress is conservative.<sup>56, 57, 58</sup> Appropriate business attire includes suits for men and women. Women’s blouses worn under suits should have a high neckline, skirts should be at least knee length, and jewelry should be modest. Men and women typically wear well-polished dress shoes. Formal business attire for meetings and official events in urban areas is the norm.<sup>59</sup> In urban centers, jeans and T-shirts are becoming popular. Young women wear short skirts, high heels, and a lot of makeup. Shorts are popular in the summer.<sup>60, 61</sup>

### Exchange 10: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	kak mnye slyedooyet adyetsyaa?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes that cover your body.	aadyentee bRyookee ee Roobshkoo s-dleeneem Rookaavoom

Exchange 10

Because of the cold weather, people often dress in layers, starting with long underwear. Over that, people may wear one or two pairs of thermal socks, jeans or slacks, and a heavy shirt with long sleeves. If the weather is extremely cold, people may wear ski pants, heavy boots, and a sweater or insulated jacket. A warm fur hat (*ushanka*) is common among both men and women.<sup>62, 63</sup>

52 Maria Azhnina, “7 Kinds of Russian Bread You’ll Want to Bite the Crust Off Of,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 13 July 2017, retrieved on 6 April 2023, [https://www.rbth.com/russian\\_kitchen/2017/07/13/7-kinds-of-russian-bread-youll-want-to-bite-the-crust-off-of\\_801997](https://www.rbth.com/russian_kitchen/2017/07/13/7-kinds-of-russian-bread-youll-want-to-bite-the-crust-off-of_801997)

53 Sergei Roganov, “Tasting Aroma of Russian Bread,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 19 November 2012, retrieved on 6 April 2023, [http://rbth.com/articles/2012/11/19/tasting\\_aroma\\_of\\_russian\\_bread\\_20225.html](http://rbth.com/articles/2012/11/19/tasting_aroma_of_russian_bread_20225.html)

54 Russia IC, “Russian Vodka,” 8 November 2007, retrieved on 6 April 2023, [http://www.russia-ic.com/culture\\_art/traditions/613/](http://www.russia-ic.com/culture_art/traditions/613/)

55 A. Gologina Khadka, “Russians,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 419.

56 Lucy Debenham, “Travel Etiquette When Travelling in Russia,” *Travel Etiquette*, 27 December 2012, retrieved on 6 April 2023, <http://www.traveletiquette.co.uk/travel-etiquette-when-travelling-russia.html>

57 Sydney Schultze, *Culture and Customs of Russia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 74.

58 ProQuest, “Russian Federation: Personal Appearances,” *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

59 Lucy Debenham, “Travel Etiquette When Travelling in Russia,” *Travel Etiquette*, 27 December 2012, retrieved on 6 April 2023, <http://www.traveletiquette.co.uk/travel-etiquette-when-travelling-russia.html>

60 ProQuest, “Russian Federation: Personal Appearances,” *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

61 Sophia Kishkovsky, “Moscow’s New Dress Code: Less,” *New York Times*, 23 August 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/fashion/24iht-fmoscow.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/fashion/24iht-fmoscow.html?_r=0)

62 A. Gologina Khadka, “Russians,” in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 419.

63 Anna Varyónova, “Twelve Russian Fashion Rules,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 27 October 2010, retrieved on 7 April 2023, [http://rbth.com/articles/2010/10/27/twelve\\_russian\\_fashion\\_rules05065.html](http://rbth.com/articles/2010/10/27/twelve_russian_fashion_rules05065.html)

**Exchange 11: Is this acceptable to wear?**

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	eta mozhnaa aadyet?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 11

## Non-Religious Holidays

There are several non-religious public holidays in Russia. New Year's Day celebrations last for 7 to 10 days in Russia. The long holiday is the result of moving spring holidays to January to give people a respite from the cold. Most Russians listen to a presidential speech at five minutes before midnight. After the clock strikes midnight, many listen to the national anthem and toast with champagne.<sup>64, 65</sup> Defender of the Fatherland Day, 23 February, was introduced as a holiday in 2006, replacing Soviet Army Day. Some Russians call it "Men's Day" because men traditionally receive cards and gifts as a sign of appreciation. Women's Day falls on 8 March, and Russians often receive a day off of work. During the Soviet period, it was one of the most popular holidays and marked the beginning of spring. Male coworkers generally buy flowers for their female colleagues, who dress up for the day.<sup>66, 67, 68, 69</sup>

Labor Day and Spring Day occur on 1 May with no special activities to mark the occasion, although many Russians enjoy the Day off with picnics and barbecues. Victory Day, on 9 March, is a popular and solemn holiday for every Russian. War veterans wear their medals and other commendations. People drink to victory and to those who perished in the nation's wars. It is a time of pride and glory. Russia Day, representing independence, follows on 12 June, when voters elected Boris Yeltsin president and when Russia became a sovereign nation. It is a day to display national pride. People attend concerts and fireworks displays throughout the nation. The year's final holiday is the Day of National Unity, which Russians celebrate on 4 November. Wreaths are laid on the tombs of national heroes. Orthodox Christians often attend a special church service. For most, however, the day is just a day off work.<sup>70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75</sup>

64 Marleen Streussnig, "New Year in Russia: How to Celebrate," Liden and Denz Intercultural Institute of Languages, n.d., retrieved on 7 April 2023, <https://lidenz.com/new-year-in-russia>

65 ProQuest, "Russian Federation: National Holidays," *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

66 A. Gologina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 419.

67 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 208.

68 Time and Date AS, "International Women's Day in Russia," n.d., retrieved on 7 April 2023, <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/women-day>

69 ProQuest, "Russian Federation: National Holidays," *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2023.

70 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 209.

71 Sydney Schultze, *Culture and Customs of Russia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 55.

72 Time and Date AS, "Russia Day in Russia," n.d., retrieved on 7 April 2023, <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/russia-day>

73 Time and Date AS, "Victory Day in Russia," n.d., retrieved on 7 April 2023, <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/victory-day>

74 Time and Date AS, "Spring and Labor Day in Russia," n.d., retrieved on 7 April 2023, <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/spring-and-labor-day>

75 Time and Date AS, "Unity Day in Russia," n.d., retrieved on 7 April 2023, <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/unity-day>

## Do's and Don'ts

### *Do's*

- Do be aware of all official regulations and follow them.
- Do wear neat and conservative clothing (men and women) in public.
- Do remove your shoes before entering a private home, temple, or mosque.
- Do wear a headscarf (women) before entering a Russian Orthodox Church or mosque.
- Do remove your gloves before shaking hands.
- Do shake a woman's hand less firmly than a man's.
- Do arrive on time when invited to a Russian home.
- Do bring an appropriate gift for your host or hostess.
- Do accept all food and drink offered to you (if possible).
- Do leave some food on your plate if you are a guest.
- Do offer to clean up after any meal or visit.

### *Don'ts*

- Don't show the soles of your shoes in public.
- Don't criticize or show any disrespect to Russian officials, citizens, or the country.
- Don't stare at or engage in overt expressions of affection with the opposite sex.
- Don't stand around casually with your hands in your pockets.
- Don't smile at strangers or act too casually or informally toward them.
- Don't chew gum in public.
- Don't enter a building while wearing a hat (for men).
- Don't whistle indoors, which many believe will bring bad luck.
- Don't hang a coat over the back of a chair; hang it up instead.
- Don't point your finger at anyone. Use the entire right hand instead.
- Don't use obscene or indecent language within earshot of Russians. Some may understand American slang.

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Traditions Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Contemporary Russia has moved away from patriarchal traditions.                      | True | False |
| 2. | When greeting Russian men, maintaining direct eye contact is important.              | True | False |
| 3. | Russians consider it rude to place your hands in your pockets when speaking.         | True | False |
| 4. | Bringing an even number of flowers is appropriate when visiting a Russian home.      | True | False |
| 5. | Russians consider it essential to address people with titles such as “Mr.” or “Mrs.” | True | False |

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Traditions Assessment Answers

1. False:  
Russia's strong patriarchal and conservative values are experiencing a revival.
2. True:  
Unless meeting a single woman for the first time, breaking off eye contact too soon may be perceived as rude or evasive.
3. False:  
This is especially true when speaking to an older person.
4. False:  
Bring an odd number of flowers since even numbers are only for somber occasions, such as funerals.
5. True:  
In formal situations, such as at work or when addressing an older person, Russians often use the first two parts of a person's name.

## Chapter 4 | Urban Life



Manezhnaya street, Moscow  
Pixsels/Public Domain

### Introduction

Across Russia, in 2023, approximately 78% of Russia's people live in cities. In post-Soviet Russia, thousands of people migrated from Siberia and Soviet Central Asia to European Russian cities due to the country's shift from central planning to a market economy. As a result, people left inaccessible and remote cities with harsh climates, where transportation and energy costs were rising sharply. Concurrently, the price of housing, food, and the production of goods rose steeply, driving thousands to migrate to cities in western Russia with its robust transportation networks and developed industrial sites.<sup>1</sup> However, the pattern of urbanization took different forms.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the Russian Revolution in 1917, most cities became smaller as thousands left urban areas for the countryside.<sup>3</sup> By the 1930s, however, the cities began to grow again under Stalin. Stalin's administration rapidly centralized the economy around heavy industry, mainly located near densely populated cities concentrated primarily in western Russia. Nevertheless, until 1959, irregular patterns of urbanization resulted in Eastern cities growing faster than Western cities.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rowman & Littlefield. *Cities of the World*. [p. 227.] Brunn, Stanley D., Jack Francis Williams, and Donald J. Zeigler. 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kort, *A Brief History of Russia* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 175–77.

<sup>3</sup> Diane Koenker, "Urbanization and Deurbanization in the Russian Revolution and Civil War," *The Journal of Modern History* 57, no. 3 (September 1985): 424–25, <http://sites.bu.edu/revolutionaryrussia/files/2013/09/Urbanization-and-Deurbanization.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Lewis and Richard H. Rowland, "Urbanization in Russia and the USSR: 1897–1966," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 4 (December 1969): 789–91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2561838>

Related to 20th-century Russian industrialization is a drop in fertility, which became a serious issue contributing to persistent low population growth in the country. Since 1920, when the average woman had about eight children, fertility rates have fallen, and the average woman now has one or two children. As a result, President Putin believes this shift has potentially critical consequences for the nation and promised to implement programs designed to raise fertility rates and keep Russians from moving abroad.<sup>5</sup>

## Urban Challenges

Environmental conditions around Russian cities have worsened due to urban infrastructure problems and ineffective disposal of municipal solid waste, including hazardous waste.<sup>6</sup> Russia sends roughly 90% of its garbage to landfills yearly. Around 30% of all landfills do not meet basic sanitation standards, suggesting that a failure to modernize the system could have disastrous health and environmental effects.<sup>7</sup> There is also little room to expand beyond existing landfill areas, causing health risks for local populations. For example, when collection stopped in Port Baikal in the Irkutsk region due to a 2018 budget crisis, waste quickly overflowed the local landfill and accumulated near water sources. This overflow became a deadly breeding ground for bacteria, leading to a severe typhoid epidemic among the local population.<sup>8</sup> In a 2019 report, Russia's Environmental Ministry listed 20 Russian cities with extremely high concentrations of air pollutants. At least half are in Siberia.<sup>9</sup>

One of Europe's most densely populated cities is Moscow. The city's overcrowding has helped fuel a serious housing crisis, traffic jams, and pollution.<sup>10</sup> Housing is difficult to find because of spiraling property values and deteriorating urban infrastructure. In the Soviet era, the state owned almost all urban housing. As a result, rents were low, and housing upkeep was minimal. As of 2020, Soviet-era concrete apartment buildings were rundown with aging water, sewage, and gas systems, with many still lacking heating and plumbing.<sup>11</sup>

Overall unemployment in 2021 was around 5.01% but fell to 3.5% by 2022.<sup>12</sup> According to the Council of the European Union, Russia's economy started shrinking in 2023 due to sanctions that weakened Russia's ability to pay for its war in Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> Because of worldwide opposition to Russia's invasion, thousands of foreign companies left Russia or curtailed their operations, stifling investments, urban industrial output, and urban jobs. This caused the ruble's value to tumble, and prices and interest rates soared to 20%, significantly affecting the average Russian.

5 Vladimir Arkhangelsky et al., "Critical 10 Years: Demographic Policies of the Russian Federation: Successes and Challenges" (report, Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Moscow, 2015), 6–8, 11–22, retrieved on 14 April 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/event/10%20Critical%20years%20english%20version.pdf>

6 András Tóth-Czifra, "How Russia's Environmental Issues Increase Risks for the Kremlin," (IMR)

Institute of Modern Russia, 20 December 2020, retrieved on 14 April 2023, <https://imrussia.org/en/analysis/3212-how-russia%E2%80%99s-environmental-issues-increase-risks-for-the-kremlin>

7 Olga Masyutina, Ekaterina Paustyan, Grigory Yakovlev, "Environmental Politics in Authoritarian

Regimes: Waste Management in the Russian Regions," (report, Bremen Papers on Economics & Innovation #2206, Institute for Economic Research and Policy May 2022), retrieved on 18 April 2023, [https://media.suub.uni-bremen.de/bitstream/elib/5929/3/2206\\_IERP\\_discussion%20paper%20Masyutina\\_Paustyan\\_Environmental%20Politics%20in%20Authoritarian%20Regimes.pdf](https://media.suub.uni-bremen.de/bitstream/elib/5929/3/2206_IERP_discussion%20paper%20Masyutina_Paustyan_Environmental%20Politics%20in%20Authoritarian%20Regimes.pdf)

8 Geohistory, "Recycling and Waste Recovery in Russia: Policy and Infrastructure Challenges," 13 June 2018, retrieved on 18 April 2023, <https://geohistory.today/recycling-waste-recovery-russia>

9 Emerging Europe Staff, "Norilsk is No Longer Russia's Most Polluted City," Emerging Europe, 24 August 2021, retrieved on 20 April 2023, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/norilsk-is-no-longer-russias-most-polluted-city/>

10 World Population Review (WPR), "Moscow Population 2023," 2023, retrieved on 18 April 2023, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/moscow-population/>

11 Estelle Levesse, "Russia's Eternal Housing Crisis," Le Monde Diplomatique, April 2021, retrieved on 11 April 2023, <https://mondediplo.com/2021/04/02russia>

12 Trading Economics, "Russia Unemployment Rate," 19 October 2015, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/russia/unemployment-rate>

13 European Council and Council of the European Union, "Infographic - Impact of Sanctions on the Russian Economy," 2023, retrieved on 18 April 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/impact-sanctions-russian-economy/>

People started pulling their money from banks and stockpiling food and goods. Sanctions left those who worked for foreign companies doubtful whether they would receive paychecks.<sup>14</sup>

## Urban Healthcare

Russia officially provides universal healthcare for its citizens, but in recent years, reduced government expenditures on healthcare have raised prices and reduced services. Partly because of this, Russia's many hospitals and many doctors fail to provide affordable, accessible, or adequate care. Healthcare facilities are concentrated in fewer care centers, which means many smaller facilities have closed in recent years. Only nine nations have a higher death rate than Russia; the infant mortality rate is among the highest in the industrialized world. The average life expectancy for men is about 67 years and about 78.5 years for women.<sup>15</sup>

The government provides free healthcare divided into federal, regional, and municipal levels with considerable variation in care, mostly below Western standards.<sup>16</sup> Urban polyclinics offer general primary care and treatment for chronic diseases. Three to four specialists staff each facility. Special focus polyclinics treat children up to the age of 19. In addition, special facilities exist for select groups such as police and high-ranking government officials.<sup>17</sup>

### Exchange 13: Is Dr. Ivanov in?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Ivanov in?	doktaR eeavaanoof oo syebyaa?
Local:	No.	Nyet

Exchange 13

Hospitals commonly charge for disposable needles, medications, and certain extra services. Trained personnel are frequently unavailable to operate specialized medical machinery. Older equipment in hospitals is often in disrepair. Few facilities offer medical specialization, but the country has higher-tech heart surgery centers in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Hospital sanitation practices are lax, and patient care is poorly coordinated between or within care centers.<sup>18</sup>

### Exchange 14: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	zdyes yest pableezastee balneetsaa?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	daa, f-tsyentye goRadaa

Exchange 14

In the country's main urban centers, pharmacies are easy to find and have green crosses outside the entrance. Some pharmacies even stay open 24 hours a day. Russian pharmaceutical regulations mean that pharmacies dispense medication differently than in the U.S. For example, some medicines available by prescription only in the U.S. are readily available over-the-counter in Russia, and vice versa.<sup>19</sup>

14 Alina Selyukh, "How Everyday Russians are Feeling the Impact from Sanctions," *NPR*, 2 March 2022, retrieved on 18 April 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/02/1083694848/sanctions-russia-ukraine-economy-war>

15 Allianz, "Healthcare in Russia," 2023, retrieved on 20 April 2023, <http://www.allianzworldwidecare.com/healthcare-in-russia>

16 Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Russia: Health," 13 February 2023, retrieved on 20 April 2023, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/RussianFederation.html>

17 Allianz, "Healthcare in Russia," 2023, retrieved on 20 April 2023, <http://www.allianzworldwidecare.com/healthcare-in-russia>

18 Anna Sharudenko, "10 Facts About Healthcare in the Russian Federation," The Borgen Project, 2023, retrieved on 20 April 2023, <https://borgenproject.org/healthcare-in-the-russian-federation/>

19 Allianz, "Healthcare in Russia," 2023, retrieved on 20 April 2023, <http://www.allianzworldwidecare.com/healthcare-in-russia>

## Urban Education

The school year in Russia typically runs from 1 September to 1 June. The country's state-organized and controlled education system produces nearly 100% literacy. Although the right to an education is a constitutional guarantee, variations in quality led parents in the past to enroll children in schools considered "the best." However, in 2012, the Supreme Court enacted a rule giving preference to students living near a school and orphans and students from low-income families, making it difficult for students living outside a district to enroll in preferred schools. In response, some parents may try to secure spots at some of the country's privately owned schools with higher education standards.<sup>20</sup>

Although not compulsory, many children as young as 18 months attend kindergarten and then begin four years of primary school. Primary school through secondary basic general education (grade nine) is mandatory. After secondary school, students must take and pass state-administered final examinations to continue on to university or vocational higher education options.<sup>21</sup>

Secondary education is split into two parts. Part one is basic general education. Students receive their basic general education certificate at the end of grade nine. To advance to part two, secondary general education, students must pass a state-administered examination to determine whether they can continue. The secondary-level certificate requires two to three years of additional study.<sup>22</sup> Students who do not pass or score high enough may decide to go to vocational school. As of July 2020, engineering and technical degrees in Russia were male high school graduates' most popular university majors. The most popular majors among women were economics and management. Natural sciences, such as chemistry, biology, and physics, were equally popular among females and males.<sup>23</sup>

## Restaurants

Dining out is not a Russian tradition, although people eat in restaurants to celebrate special occasions. Although dining out has gained popularity in recent years, some still consider it an insult to receive an invitation to eat in a restaurant rather than in someone's home.<sup>24</sup>

In Russian cities, restaurants offer a range of choices, including international cuisines and eating styles. Local restaurants usually offer traditional Russian food such as *pelmeni* (meat dumplings), *piroshky* (meat-filled fried rolls), and *blini* (pancakes stuffed with fish or caviar). Typical drinks include *chai* (sweet tea), different varieties of vodka, and an assortment of wines flavored with fruit, herbs, leaves, or flowers.<sup>25</sup>

20 James Vick, "The Education System in Russia," *Expatica.com*, 25 April 2023, retrieved on 8 May 2023, <https://www.expatica.com/ru/education/children-education/the-education-system-in-russia-104072/>

21 James Vick, "The Education System in Russia," *Expatica.com*, 25 April 2023, retrieved on 8 May 2023, <https://www.expatica.com/ru/education/children-education/the-education-system-in-russia-104072/>

22 Expatica.com, "The Education System in Russia," 31 May 2011, [http://www.expatica.ru/education/school/The-education-system-in-Russia\\_15732.html](http://www.expatica.ru/education/school/The-education-system-in-Russia_15732.html)

23 EuroEducation.net, The European Education Directory, "Russia,"

24 Anna Pavlovskaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette*, 2nd ed. (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 183.

25 James Tibble, "Russian Stolovaya – A Short History," *Liden & Denz*, 2023, retrieved on 8 May 2023, <https://lidenz.com/russian-stolovaya/#:~:text=Aside%20from%20its%20reasonable%20prices.break%20from%20the%20working%20day.>

**Exchange 15: What type of meat is this?**

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	kakoye eta myaasa?
Local:	Lamb.	baaRaaneenaa

Exchange 15

**Exchange 16: I would like coffee or tea.**

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	yaa bvy Khatyel kofye eelee chaay
Local:	Sure.	Kanyeshna

Exchange 16

Russia has a variety of eating establishments. The *kafe* (cafe) generally has cheaper fare, and the *kofeynya* is an upscale cafe that serves pastries, although light meals are occasionally available. The *zakusochnaya* has a limited menu and varies from a simple eatery to a disreputable bar. The *ryumochnaya* is usually a dive bar specializing in vodka shots. A more contemporary restaurant style is the simple Asian diner known as a *poznaya*. The *stolovaya* (canteen) is the most popular choice among ordinary Russians. Located in public areas near universities or bus stations, these establishments offer cheap alternatives to restaurant dining.<sup>26</sup>

**Exchange 17: Are you still serving breakfast?**

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	mozhna pazaaftRaakaat?
Local:	Yes.	Daa

Exchange 17

Russians do not split the bill and expect the person making the invitation to pay for everyone. When eating in cafeterias or office canteens, diners are expected to pay for their own meals.<sup>27</sup>

**Exchange 18: Can I have my total bill, please?**

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	mozhnoo mnye schyot, pazhaalooystaa
Local:	Yes, sure!	daa, kanyeshna!

Exchange 18

Tipping 10% directly to your server is customary in restaurants, even if a service charge is included on the bill.<sup>28</sup>

## Marketplaces and Street Vendors

Russia has a wide variety of shops and stores, ranging from large shopping malls filled with Western goods and open 24 hours a day to smaller traditional Soviet-style shops, which continue to operate despite their smaller selections. Kiosks offer a limited selection of goods of variable quality. For the most part, prices in Russian markets

<sup>26</sup> Russian Language Blog, "5 Distinct Types of Food Establishments in Russia," *Transparent Language*, 17 January 2017, retrieved on 9 May 2023, <https://blogs.transparent.com/russian/5-distinct-types-of-food-establishments-in-russia/>

<sup>27</sup> Etiquette Scholar, "Russian Etiquette," 2019, retrieved on 9 May 2023, [http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining\\_etiquette/table-etiquette/europe-e\\_dinner\\_etiquette/russian.html](http://www.etiquettescholar.com/dining_etiquette/table-etiquette/europe-e_dinner_etiquette/russian.html)

<sup>28</sup> Simon Richmond et al., *Lonely Planet: Russia*, 5th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 726.

are fixed, and bargaining is not possible. The one exception is at agricultural markets, where individuals sell food they have produced.<sup>29</sup>

#### Exchange 19: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	mozhnoo pasmatRyet pableezhye?
Local:	Sure.	kanyeshna

Exchange 19

Buyers also need to be aware that taking arms, artwork, and antiques out of the country is not allowed without permission from the Ministry of Culture.<sup>30</sup>

Food is available at numerous street stalls in the cities. Patrons can buy dried fruit, fried doughnuts, Russian pancakes, snacks, tea, and other products from these outdoor eateries. Prices are fixed at such informal places, and cash is required.<sup>31</sup>

#### Exchange 20: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	skoolka yeshchyo vy boodyetye zdyes?
Local:	Three more hours.	yeshchyo tRee chaasaa

Exchange 20

## Money, Credit Cards, and ATMs

The ruble (RUB) is the official currency in Russia. In May 2023, USD 1 equaled RUB 79.<sup>32</sup> Only rubles are accepted for transactions, even if vendors state prices in U.S. dollars or euros. Bills must be in good condition when exchanging money in banks, or tellers will likely reject them. Remember that exchanging your currency for rubles before entering Russia is easier, and exchange rates inside Russia (at least for USDs and euros) can be competitive.<sup>33</sup>

While some proprietors prefer cash, credit (Visa and Mastercard) and bank cards are not widely accepted.<sup>34</sup> Due to the high occurrence of credit card fraud in Russia, if travelers do use a credit or debit card, they must notify most banks before travel, or the bank will likely block them from use. If using cash, the buyer should carry small-denomination bills because vendors may not have change for larger bills.<sup>35</sup>

29 Lonely Planet, "Shopping Centre in Moscow," 2023, retrieved on 9 May 2023, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/russia/moscow/shopping>

30 World Travel Guide, "Russia Travel Guide: Money and Duty Free for Russia," 2023, retrieved on 9 May 2023, <https://www.worldtravelguide.net/guides/europe/russia/money-duty-free/>

31 "Russian Street Food Tour, From Cheap Georgian Dishes to a Unique \$2 Shawarma | Izhevsk, Russia," YouTube video, 10:03, filmed and posted by Elena Schlombs, 29 January 2021, retrieved on 12 May 2023, <https://youtu.be/vptgltiP5qs>

32 Oanda, "Currency Converter," 2023, retrieved on 12 May 2023, <https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/?from=USD&to=RUB&amount=1>

33 Saint-Petersburg.com, "Money Matters," 2023, retrieved on 15 May 2023, <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/essentials/money-matters/>

34 World Travel Guide, "Russia Travel Guide: Money and Duty Free for Russia," 2023, retrieved on 15 May 2023, <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/236/money/Europe/Russian-Federation.html>

35 Simon Richmond et al., *Lonely Planet: Russia, 5th ed.* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 725.

**Exchange 21: Do you accept U.S. currency?**

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	vy pReeneemaayetye dool-laaRy s-shchaa?
Local:	No, we only accept roubles.	nyet, mvy pReeneemaayem talko Rooblee

Exchange 21

**Exchange 22: Can you give me change for this?**

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	vy moozhyetye sdaat mnye sdaachoo?
Local:	No.	Nyet

Exchange 22

The easiest way to access money is through ATMs, which are widely available in Russian cities in the lobbies of most hotels, in metro stations, and next to banks. Many banks also take credit cards for cash advances.<sup>36</sup> Using cryptocurrency to purchase goods and services in Russia was banned on 14 July 2022.<sup>37</sup>

## Urban Traffic and Transportation

The Soviets developed Russia's transportation system to serve the country's economic development and promote the rapid expansion of heavy industry. Planners designed a system to transport the maximum volume of products and people at the lowest cost, with little thought for convenience. Today, the system, while extensive, is in a state of poor repair. Most major cities have various public transportation options that are usually cheap but can be unreliable. Public transport in major cities is heavily used. Tram and metro networks are often the safest and most efficient ways to navigate major cities.<sup>38</sup>

### Cars

Driving a private car in Russia is not a preferred means of travel. The vast distances make travel by car somewhat impractical. In addition, the lack of roads and severe winter weather can make driving tricky in some parts of the country. If possible, avoid driving at night. Urban roads are frequently in disrepair, and manhole covers are often uneven with the road. Drivers are required to have insurance. A U.S. driver's license and a notarized Russian translation allow drivers to operate vehicles for 60 days. International Driving Permits are also acceptable. Those with a business, residence, or employment visa must carry a valid Russian driver's license.<sup>39</sup>

Severe deterioration affects many roads throughout the country, and some roads are unpaved or unsafe, making them impassable in winter or during the spring thaw. In cities, traffic is heavy, gridlock is common, and drivers ignore traffic laws. The mix of crowded vehicles and aggressive driving is a continual problem.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Saint-Petersburg.com, "Money Matters," 2023, retrieved on 15 May 2023, <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/essentials/money-matters/>

<sup>37</sup> Monica Noronha, "Putin Signs Law Banning Crypto-Based Payments in Russia," *CryptoSlate*, 15 July 2022, retrieved on 15 May 2023, <https://cryptoslate.com/putin-signs-law-banning-crypto-based-payments-in-russia/>

<sup>38</sup> CountryReports, "Traffic and Road Conditions in Russia" *CountryReports*, 2023, 30 May 2023, retrieved on 17 May 2023, <https://www.countryreports.org/country/Russia/traffic.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Russia: Travel and Transportation," 13 February 2023, retrieved on 17 May 2023, <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/russia.html>

<sup>40</sup> CountryReports, "Traffic and Road Conditions in Russia" *CountryReports*, 2023, 19 May 2023, retrieved on 10 May 2023, <https://www.countryreports.org/country/Russia/traffic.htm>

**Exchange 24: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	yest zayes nyedaalyeko KhaRosheey myeKhaaneek?
Local:	Yes.	Daa

Exchange 24

**Taxis**

Metered taxis are available in large cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Taxi service caters to both affluent passengers and budget travelers, and taxis have distinctive colors or brightly lit signs. Since it is impossible to hail taxis on the street, call registered taxis beforehand. Unregistered taxis, sometimes called “gypsy taxis,” are more plentiful but should be avoided. There have been reports of passengers being assaulted and robbed. Avoid getting into any taxi that already has a passenger. Before entering any taxi, check the backseat to ensure nobody is hiding. Although official taxis are generally safe, please exercise caution when taking a taxi after dark.<sup>41, 42</sup>

**Exchange 25: Where can I get a cab?**

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	gdye yaa magoo fzyaat taaksee
Local:	Over there.	Taam

Exchange 25

**Metros, Trams, and Trolleys**

In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, well-designed metro (subway) systems operate with trains arriving every 2–3 minutes during non-peak hours.<sup>43</sup> The Moscow Metro is one of the world’s most extensive subway systems, and many consider it one of the most efficient ways to travel long distances in the city.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Kazan, Nizhniy Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Samara, Vologda, and Yekaterinburg have smaller metro systems.<sup>45, 46</sup> Nonetheless, travelers should take precautions since terrorists have targeted the subway, and attacks have killed several people in past years. In addition, the subway is a prime area for pickpockets and petty criminals.<sup>47</sup>

Buses are available and provide the cheapest way to travel throughout the country. In cities, buses are reliable but tend to become less so as the distance from the city center increases. Newly popular *marshrutkas* are minibuses that travel along major bus routes, and although they are more expensive, they can be more convenient. Public transportation in Moscow and Saint Petersburg includes trams and trolleys (inexpensive and run from early morning until after midnight).<sup>48</sup>

41 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Russia Country Security Report,” 19 May 2023, retrieved on 30 May 2023, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=17069>

42 Saint-Petersburg.com, “Taxi in St. Petersburg,” 2023, retrieved on 19 May 2023, <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/transport/taxi/index.asp>

43 Saint-Petersburg.com, “St. Petersburg Metro,” 2023, retrieved on 30 May 2023, <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/transport/metro/>

44 Railway-Technology.com, “The World’s Longest Metro and Subway Systems,” 10 December 2013, <http://www.railway-technology.com/features/featurethe-worlds-longest-metro-and-subway-systems-4144725/>

45 Simon Richmond et al., *Lonely Planet: Russia*, 5th ed. (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2009), 747–48.

46 Civitatis Moacow, “Transport: Moscow Metro,” n.d., retrieved on 30 May 2023, <https://www.introducingmoscow.com/metro>

47 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Russia Country Security Report: Crime and Safety,” 17 May 2023, retrieved on 17 May 2023, <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=17069>

48 Ksenia Elzes, ed., “St Petersburg in Your Pocket” (travel guide, 2023), retrieved on 30 May 2023, <http://www.inyourpocket.com/data/download/st-petersburg.pdf>

## Rail

Russian Railways (RZD) runs one of the most extensive rail networks in the world. Long-distance trains can be booked in advance and offer comfortable travel options. Although not the fastest way to get around, travel by rail is inexpensive, and trains are generally reliable and punctual. *Elektrichka* (suburban trains) provides local service between major urban centers and outlying communities. The Trans-Siberian Railroad connects western Russia to Vladivostok on Russia's east coast and is perhaps the most well-known rail journey in the country. It now connects with several other railroad lines and is an essential means of transportation for passengers and freight. The direct line between Moscow and Vladivostok is 9,289 km (5,771 mi); in 2002, authorities completed electric service for the entire line.<sup>49</sup>

### Exchange 23: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	Ryadom yest vookzaal
Local:	No	Nyet

Exchange 23

## Air

Because of the country's size, air travel is a reasonable alternative. The smaller regional airlines, particularly those in Siberia, have the poorest safety records. Security on such airlines is questionable, and there have been recent reports of bombs being smuggled on board after terrorists bribed officials. On the other hand, Aeroflot Russian Airlines has a decent safety record and complies with international safety standards. The domestic carrier Transaero also has a consistent flight safety record. However, authorities frequently cancel flights if they are less than 70% filled.<sup>50</sup>

## Street Crime and Solicitations

In Russian cities, crime—often linked to poverty—is widespread. Westerners are frequent targets of violent and nonviolent offenses such as theft and physical assault. Pickpocketing, often practiced by young children, is a commonly reported crime. It may occur in crowded areas such as train or metro stations, tourist areas, and markets. Vehicles are often burglarized. Criminals have robbed people after slipping drugs into their drinks, rendering them unconscious. Robbers may also pose as police officials or taxi drivers to gain access to their targets.<sup>51, 52</sup>

Terrorism poses additional threats to personal safety, particularly in the Northern Caucasus regions. Terrorists have targeted the Moscow subway several times in the recent past. Public transportation remains vulnerable to attacks. Various extremist groups have targeted minority group members, including U.S. citizens. Be aware that racist skinhead groups or gangs and the police often target African Americans, Asian Americans, and those perceived as being of Middle Eastern descent.<sup>53</sup>

49 Ian Frazier, *Travels in Siberia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 9.

50 Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Russia: Travel and Transportation," 2023, retrieved on 30 May 2023, <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/russia.html>

51 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Russia Country Security Report," 2 August 2021, retrieved on 30 May 2023, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/f312a926-0723-427a-947f-1c391b3776e8>

52 Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Russia: Safety and Security," 17 March 2015, <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/russia.html>

53 Gov.UK, "Foreign Travel Advice Russia," 2023, retrieved on 30 May 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/russia/safety-and-security>

## Beggars

Begging is legal in Russia if panhandlers do not harass their targets. Many beggars live and work in Russia's cities, particularly around the metro stations. They may be people from poor, rural areas who have moved to the cities in search of jobs but who find themselves begging as a profession when they cannot find employment. In some cases, beggars are professionals or belong to organized crime groups. Beggars may include women with children, although it is illegal to involve minors in begging.<sup>54</sup>

### Exchange 27: Give me money.

Soldier:	Give me money.	dyyenyeg daaytye
Local:	I do not have any.	oo myenyaa nyet dyenyeg

*Exchange 27*

### Exchange 28: Please, buy something from me.

Soldier:	Please, buy something from me.	pazhaalooystaa, koopeetye oo myenyaa shto-neebood
Local:	Sorry, I have no money left	eezveeneetye, dyenyeg bolshye nye ostaaloos

*Exchange 28*

<sup>54</sup> Russian Legal Information Agency, "Beggars with Children Could Face Up to 6 Years in Russian Prison—Report," 16 July 2015, retrieved on 30 May 2023, [http://www.rapsinews.com/legislation\\_news/20150716/274153636.html](http://www.rapsinews.com/legislation_news/20150716/274153636.html)

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Urban Life Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |   |      |       |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Life expectancy in Russia is one of the lowest in the world.                        | True | False |
| 2. | Unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural areas.                          | True | False |
| 3. | Life expectancy in Russia is one of the lowest in the world.                        | True | False |
| 4. | Bargaining is common in most Russian markets.                                       | True | False |
| 5. | Russia's education system is still struggling to achieve an adequate literacy rate. | True | False |

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Urban Life Assessment Answers

1. True:  
Only ten nations have a lower Life expectancy than Russia, where the average for men is about 65 years.
2. False:  
Urban unemployment is significantly lower than rural levels. Unemployment is negligible in Moscow and St Petersburg, the two largest cities.
3. True:  
Moscow is one of Europe's most densely populated cities which has helped fuel a serious housing crisis along with traffic jams and pollution.
4. False:  
With the exception of agricultural markets where people sell individually produced food, prices in Russian markets are fixed.
5. False:  
Russia's education system has produced nearly 100% literacy. The system emphasizes technology and science and remains relatively strong in these areas.

# Chapter 5 | Rural Life



Oshevsky Pogost village  
Wikimedia/Mpr89

## Introduction

Russia has experienced a dramatic shift from a predominantly rural to an urban country. Thousands of small villages have disappeared, although some rural ethnic groups (such as Muslims, Chechens, and others who live in the North Caucasus) have experienced rapid population growth.<sup>1</sup> Since 1998, migration and deaths have decimated the Russian countryside. Rural life has been transformed from rural collectives for farming into a more market-based system of household plots. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet system has made healthcare delivery and school systems more local and frayed, if not corrupt. The standard of living in the countryside has fallen since 1991. The transition to a more market-based economy has hurt farms and villages. Rural incomes are far lower than in urban areas, and the general living conditions are worse. The rural economy has diversified beyond farming, and farmers strive to be more efficient despite confusion over land tenure.<sup>2</sup>

1 Marat Iliysov, OBCT Newsletter, "Chechen demographic rise: reasons and concerns," 1 October 2019, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Chechnya/Chechen-demographic-rise-reasons-and-concerns-191886>

2 Felix Light, The Moscow Times, "The Young People Don't Stay Here: Depopulation Haunts Russia's Breadbasket," 3 August 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/08/03/the-young-people-dont-stay-here-depopulation-haunts-russias-breadbasket-a74683>

## Rural Migration

Until the early 20th century, Russia's economy was primarily agricultural. Most Russian people lived in rural areas and practiced small-scale farming. Significant crops included grain (wheat, barley, and oats) and vegetables, depending on the region. The use of machinery in agriculture was rare, even in the last half of the 19th century. Peasants traditionally worked by hand, and agricultural processes were inefficient even on the few large estates.<sup>3</sup> For over 60 years in the 20th century, the Soviet government centralized the economy and controlled all decisions concerning production, consumption, pricing, and investment. Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), which started in 1921, specified government control over heavy industry, although the policy allowed limited private activity in light industry and agriculture. During the regime of Josef Stalin (1927–53), the government forced thousands of peasants to collectivize their land and work in large state-owned farms organized to meet specific agricultural production goals. Within a short time, farmland was organized into cooperatives in which landowners were members of kolkhozy (collective farms) or sovkhozes (state farms).<sup>4</sup>

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, spelling the state-funded collective farm's end. Next, the "optimization" of administration in rural villages drastically reduced the number of hospitals and schools. Together, these caused further rural depopulation. By 2020, agriculture accounted for only 4.7% of GDP while employing only 9.7% of the workforce. According to Russia's official count, 20,000 rural villages have been abandoned, and 36,000 others have a population of just ten people or less due to migration to cities. Ongoing depopulation has caused some to worry that rural life in Russia will cease to exist.<sup>5, 6</sup>

## Land Distribution/Ownership

During the 1917 Communist Revolution, the Bolsheviks nationalized all lands and abolished private land ownership. Beginning in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the government of the Russian Federation started to redistribute collective and state farmlands to individuals. Other land reforms followed. By 1993, individuals had the constitutional right to sell their agricultural lands, although laws about selling household plots remained unspecified. Governmental authorities maintained the first right to purchase land from collectives. Small plots of land from family members could aggregate into larger farms. By 2000, private individuals owned nearly 8% of Russia's land.<sup>7</sup>

In 2023, large enterprises (the same state collective farms existing during the Soviet era) leased most agricultural land. Some suggested that all private agricultural land would eventually be absorbed. Reforms in 2003 gave the federal government a preemptive right on all land sales, and regional governments gained the right to limit the concentration of land owned by a single individual. In addition, the government made it illegal for foreign agencies to own agricultural land.<sup>8</sup>

3 Glenn Curtis ed., "Economic Conditions in Mid-1996," in *Russia: A Country Study*, (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1998), <https://countrystudies.us/russia/>

4 Martin McCauley et al., "Russia," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 31 May 2023, retrieved on 31 May 2023,

5 Albina Kovalyova, "Russia's Dying Villages Inspire a Rising Star of the Art World," *NBC News*, 14 May 2019, retrieved on 31 May 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-s-dying-villages-inspire-rising-star-art-world-n994436>

6 Felix Light, "'The Young People Don't Stay Here': Depopulation Haunts Russia's Breadbasket," *Moscow Times*, 3 August 2019, retrieved on 31 May 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/08/03/the-young-people-dont-stay-here-depopulation-haunts-russias-breadbasket-a74683>

7 M. Petrick, "Post-Soviet Agricultural Restructuring: A Success Story After All?" *Comparative Economic Studies* 63 (2021): , 623–647. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41294-021-00172-1>

8 Vladimir Trukhachev, Anna Ivolve, and Marina Lescheva, "Enhancement of Land Tenure Relations as a Factor of Sustainable Agricultural Development: Case of Stavropol Krai, Russia," *Sustainability* 7 (2015): 168–69, <http://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/7/1/164/pdf>

**Exchange 29: Do you own this land?**

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	vy vlaadyelyets etoy zyemlee?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 29

Therefore, Russia only partially privatized land ownership. The government divided state-owned properties into virtual plots of equal size, and each adult who had previously worked on the collective received one land share, designated by a piece of paper representing a virtual plot of fractional ownership in the collective. Individual “owners” could choose to keep the share as part of joint agricultural efforts or withdraw to create an individual business. Under this system, lands are neither wholly owned by the individual nor the state. Nevertheless, nearly 60% of agricultural lands are held privately. Private shares, on the other hand, are actual physical plots of land owned by individuals. Less than 10% of farmland falls in this category. Russia’s 2001 land code fully privatized urban and commercial land ownership, leaving rural and agricultural lands untouched. Foreign individuals or agencies can own only nonagricultural land.<sup>9</sup>

## Rural Economy

Russia’s rural economy and demographics are changing, and much of the economy has collapsed in some regions. Rural unemployment is much higher than in urban areas (5.2% vs. 2.1%). Furthermore, the rural population is aging. Most young people migrate to cities, and the number of small-scale farms has dropped. In 1990, one year before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 86% of the rural population worked on collective farms. By 2006, that number represented one-third of the people. Many rural residents now work in manufacturing, trade and consumer industries, and social services.<sup>10</sup>

### Agriculture

Despite Russia’s vast size, farming takes up only 13% of the nation’s land.<sup>11</sup> Most of this land is in the “fertile triangle,” a region encompassing most of southern and central European Russia and small stretches of land in southwest Siberia.<sup>12</sup> The main agricultural products are wheat, barley, rye, and oats. Other products include sunflowers, sugar beets, flax, and potatoes. Despite the privatization of land ownership, many farmers continue to work as part of cooperatives. However, such farms suffer from inefficient management, and their ability to create profits relies mainly on their access to urban markets. In addition, years of neglect related to technological innovation and investment have contributed to reduced yields, higher production costs, and inefficiency.<sup>13</sup>

9 V. N. Khlystun and V. M. Stolyarov, “Thirty years of land transformation in Russia,” (conference paper, 2020 IOP Conference Series: Earth Environmental Science), 2 June 2024, retrieved on 6 February 2024, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1755-1315/579/1/012126>

10 Vasily Erokhin, Wim Heijman, and Anna Ivolga, “Sustainable Rural Development in Russia Through Diversification: The Case of the Stavropol Region,” *Visegrad Journal on Bioeconomy and Sustainable Development* 3, no. 1 (January 2014): 20, retrieved on 31 May 2023, [http://www.degruyter.com/dg/viewarticle.fullcontentlink:pdfeventlink/\\$002fj\\$002fvjbsd.2014.3.issue-1\\$002fvjbsd-2014-0004\\$002fvjbsd-2014-0004.pdf?ac=j\\$002fvjbsd.2014.3.issue-1\\$002fvjbsd-2014-0004\\$002fvjbsd-2014-0004.xml](http://www.degruyter.com/dg/viewarticle.fullcontentlink:pdfeventlink/$002fj$002fvjbsd.2014.3.issue-1$002fvjbsd-2014-0004$002fvjbsd-2014-0004.pdf?ac=j$002fvjbsd.2014.3.issue-1$002fvjbsd-2014-0004$002fvjbsd-2014-0004.xml)

11 Central Intelligence Agency, “Russia: Economy,” in *The World Factbook*, 31 May 2023, retrieved on 31 May 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/russia/#economy>

12 Joseph J. Hobbs, *World Regional Geography*, 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning, 2009), 183.

13 Hugh Seton-Watson et al., “Russia: Economy: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing, Agriculture,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 31 May 2023, retrieved on 31 May 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/People#toc38612>

**Exchange 30: Where do you work, sir?**

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	kyem vy Raabotaayetye?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	yaa RaaznaRaabocheey

*Exchange 30*

To help rejuvenate agriculture and increase output, the government launched several programs and pumped considerable funds into the agricultural sector between 2008 and 2012. Due to record yields of sunflower seeds, sugar beets, soybeans, potatoes, and other vegetable crops, 2011 was excellent for farmers. Russian agricultural competitiveness increased in 2006, with total production up nearly 30%.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, the livestock and poultry industries grew because of the construction of more livestock facilities and the upgrading of existing ones. According to Russia's agriculture minister, the nation has achieved food security in grains, sugar, potatoes, vegetables, and poultry. However, international sanctions have created a problem for Russian agriculture. Experts estimate it could take approximately five years for Russia to increase productivity enough to compensate for lost food imports. In response, in 2022, Russia temporarily banned exports of wheat, barley, rye, and corn to members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This ban includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. None of these countries is subject to Russia's grain export quotas or taxes.<sup>15</sup>

**Exchange 31: Do you know this area very well?**

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	vy KhaRasho znaayetye etoo myestnast?
Local:	Yes.	Daa

*Exchange 31***Fishing, Lumber, and Forestry**

Fishing is essential to Russia's economy, which has access to the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Russian fishermen catch approximately 4 million tons of fish annually, mainly for export. Russian canneries produce nearly one-third of the world's canned fish and one-fourth of its fresh and frozen fish. In addition to Russia's larger marine fleets, smaller-scale ventures operate in the Sea of Azov and the Black and Caspian Seas. Freshwater fishing from Russia's many rivers is not as lucrative as it once was because pollution and reduced river flows have severely depleted fish populations. Aquaculture has been a small but growing subsector but has also been hit by sanctions in recent years, causing shortages in fish feed, juvenile fish, and equipment shortages.<sup>16</sup>

Russia's vast forest reserves are the largest in the world. Russia's forests constitute about one-fifth of the world's total, representing an area nearly as large as the continental United States. However, the cold Russian climate inhibits rapid growth in logged areas. Russia has the world's largest forest reserves, and lumber, pulp, and paper products are essential to the rural and national economies. Yet the industry remains seriously underdeveloped even though investments in recent years have modernized and improved pulp and paper mills. Illegal logging has also raised concerns. The EU Timber Regulation came into effect in 2013. Its laws require timber importers to ensure

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Foreign Agricultural Service, "Crop Explorer - Commodity Intelligence Reports - Russian Federation: Russia: Seasonal Summary for the 2020/21 Season," USDA Commodity Intelligence Report, 22 January 2021, retrieved on 25 June 2023, [https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropeplorer/pecad\\_stories.aspx?regionid=rs&ftype=topstories](https://ipad.fas.usda.gov/cropeplorer/pecad_stories.aspx?regionid=rs&ftype=topstories)

<sup>15</sup> Gro Intelligence, "Russia Enacts Partial Ban on Grain Exports in Another Hit to Global Wheat Supplies," 15 March 2022, retrieved on 25 June 2023, <https://www.gro-intelligence.com/insights/russia-enacts-partial-ban-on-grain-exports-in-another-hit-to-global-wheat-supplies>

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Gerden, "Russian Aquaculture Hit Hard by Sanctions," *The Fish Site*, 6 December 2022, retrieved on 26 June 2023, <https://thefishsite.com/articles/russian-aquaculture-is-hit-hard-by-sanctions>

the legal harvesting of timber. After the first year of its implementation, the regulation indicated that Russia's timber industry complied with the standard. However, due to the ongoing Ukraine war, Russian import/export restrictions in 2022 have increased the buying and selling of Russian lumber on the black market.<sup>17</sup>

## Rural Transportation

Driving in Russia is challenging, but driving may be necessary since most rural areas have poorly developed public transportation systems. Roads are often unpaved and in disrepair, and reliable road connections may not exist between small villages and mid-sized towns. Severe weather negatively affects rural roads, leaving them so muddy or full of potholes that they become impassable. Traveling at night is not recommended outside of Russia's major urban centers. Many cars have no brake lights, and some have only one headlight.<sup>18</sup> Gas stations and repair shops are scarce on many newer roads. Drivers should carry extra fan belts, fuses, and other spare parts because these may be hard to obtain outside urban settings. In small towns, regional bus service is usually available.<sup>19</sup>

The Soviets laid thousands of miles of railroad track, spanning the country's vast reaches from west to east. The government used railroads predominantly for cargo traffic, but they have remained an essential means of passenger travel into remote areas. Although the railway system accounts for nearly half of Russia's passenger travel, the density of railway routes varies and is higher in western and central Russia than in Siberia.<sup>20</sup>

Russian Railways (RZD) is the state-owned rail monopoly that operates Russia's railway network. Different kinds of trains and levels of passenger train service are available, from first class through fourth class. The least expensive (fourth-class) train service will likely be slow, and the carriages may be uncomfortable. Many consider train travel relatively safe since one or two conductors manage the service on each carriage for 24 hours. Air travel is the only way to reach some destinations, such as remote parts of Siberia.<sup>21</sup>

## Rural Health

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, the healthcare system declined, particularly in rural parts of the country. The central state stopped providing needed medical supplies and equipment to remote areas, leaving many villages without healthcare infrastructure. Since local governments did not have funding to procure medical essentials, they attempted to patch together their healthcare systems. Many people in towns or villages, some of which have no public transportation, must travel more than 20 km (12 mi) to reach a healthcare facility.<sup>22</sup>

Despite constitutional guarantees of the right to free medical care, patients must provide bribes and extra fees for doctors, who earn barely a subsistence income unless they charge outside their approved fee structure. Few rural patients can afford these out-of-pocket costs, and according to one nongovernmental medical organization,

17 Sarunas Cerniauskas (Siena/OCCRP) et. al., "How Banned Russian and Belarusian Wood is Sneaked into the EU," *VSquare*, 21 December 2022, retrieved on 26 June 2023, <https://vsquare.org/how-banned-russian-and-belarusian-wood-is-sneaked-into-the-eu/>

18 Expatica, "Driving in Russia: Road Rules and Regulations," 16 March 2023, retrieved on 26 June 2023, <https://www.expatica.com/ru/living/transportation/driving-in-russia-831042/>

19 Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Russia: Safety and Security," 13 February 2023, retrieved on 26 June 2023, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/RussianFederation.html>

20 Dominic Lieven, "Russia: Economy: Transportation and Telecommunications," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2023, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Manufacturing#ref38617>

21 Stefan Hedlund, "Russian rail: Behind the Curve," *Geopolitical Intelligence Services (GIS)*, 26 September 2019, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/russia-rail-system/>

22 Jodi Koehn, "Russian Healthcare Crisis," (part of Meeting Reports, The Wilson Center Kennan Institute, Washington D.C., 2021), retrieved on 17 June 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/russian-health-care-crisis>

more than half of Russia's citizens are not receiving necessary medical help. Most of these people live in remote, rural parts of the country. Increasingly marginalized, rural Russians are also experiencing growing rates of drug addiction and alcoholism.<sup>23</sup>

Rural health posts provide basic health checks and can handle routine exams and minor injuries. Each post covers about 4,000 residents. For larger rural populations (up to 7,000), there are health centers with a broad range of primary care services. Typically staffed with nurses, a pediatrician, a therapist, and a midwife/gynecologist, these facilities can also perform minor surgeries.<sup>24</sup> Often, there is a single pharmacy in each large village. Residents may have to stand in line all day to get medications if they are available. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, international sanctions have caused severe shortages, and rural areas have been significantly affected. The high costs of such medicines are outside the reach of many.<sup>25</sup>

Exchange 32: Is there a medical clinic nearby?		
Soldier:	GIs there a medical clinic nearby?	zdyes yest pableezastee balneetsa?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ddaa, von taam

Exchange 32

## Rural Education

As with most other services, the quality of education declined after the Soviet Union collapsed and state-sponsored services were no longer available. In addition, the government enacted educational reforms during the transition period to a free market economy. As a result, high-quality job training and advanced education in Russia are generally available only in the larger cities where universities are located. Furthermore, the number of schools and kindergartens for children in rural Russia has declined, partly because of lower fertility rates.<sup>26</sup>

Although villages and towns in rural Russia are small, most have a basic or primary school. About 88% of Russian villages, accounting for 32% of the rural population, have fewer than 500 residents. Providing social services, including education, is difficult, and access to education is limited. Students may have to spend several hours commuting daily, riding a bus up to 30 km (18 mi) each way. Although 70% of all Russian schools are in rural areas, most are small. Two-thirds of rural primary schools have 14 or fewer students; 20% of middle-level schools have 40 or fewer students, and over 50% of secondary schools have fewer than 200 students. The average rural school has only 113 students. Russia is experimenting with distance learning to help alleviate the problem of too few teachers and insufficient schools in some of the most remote regions.<sup>27</sup>

23 Mark Lawrence Schrad, "Russia Has a Vodka Addiction. So Does Vladimir Putin – But Not the Same Way," *Politico Magazine*, 5 May 2023, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/05/05/vladimir-putin-vodka-empire-00095109>

24 Theo Merz, "'Like Something Out of a Horror Movie': Russia's Healthcare Crisis Accelerates Rural Decline," *The Telegraph*, 29 October 2020, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/like-something-horror-movie-russias-healthcare-crisis-accelerates/>

25 Valery Federov and Will Tizard, "Russian Pharmacies Short Of Medication; Customers Blame Sanctions," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 2 February 2023, retrieved on 2 February 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-drug-shortage-pharmacy-sanctions-ukraine-war-antibiotics-nurofen/32252470.html>

26 A. Rykova Komariah et al., "Assessing the Quality and Efficiency of Education in Rural Schools through the Models of Integration and the Cooperation of Educational Institutions: A Case Study of Russia and Indonesia," *Sustainability*, 14 (14), 2022: 8442, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14148442>

27 Alexander Kauschanski, "Teachers for Russia Program Brings Education to Rural Areas," *Deutsche Welle*, 17 November 2019, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/teachers-for-russia-program-brings-modern-education-to-rural-schools/a-51233565>

**Exchange 33: Is there a school nearby?**

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	Ryaadam yest shkolaa?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 33

In the late and post-Soviet years, public funding was unavailable to repair school facilities. Consequently, schools began to rely on private and local funding sources. As a result, school buildings and equipment deteriorated, and textbooks and educational materials were scarce.<sup>28</sup> In 2020, approximately 3,200 schools in Russia lacked indoor restrooms.<sup>29</sup> In the cold regions of Siberia and the Far East, 51% and 59% (respectively) had no indoor running water, and about two-thirds had no indoor sewer connections.<sup>30</sup>

**Exchange 34: Do your children go to school?**

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	dvaashee dyetee Khodyaat f-shkoloo?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 34

The structure of the educational process is the same in rural areas as in the cities. School is compulsory for all children through grade nine, at the end of which students receive a general education certificate. The secondary-level certification requires two to three years of additional education. After secondary school, students must take and pass state-administered final examinations to continue to university or vocational higher education options.<sup>31</sup>

## Who's in Charge?

New laws in 2003 restructured local governments and gave more power to local citizens while placing those local governments under more federal oversight. As a result, citizens had less autonomy than before.<sup>32, 33</sup> Local self-governments (LSGs) have a complex organizational and territorial structure under these new reforms. Lower-level municipalities may be either rural (*selskie poseleniya*) or urban (*gorodskie poseleniya*) and must have at least 1,000 residents. Each municipality has a budget, though many funds no longer derive from local sources. Municipal districts (*munitsipal'nye rajony*), similar to counties, represent a two-tiered local authority composed of lower-level rural and urban municipalities. A third, higher-level governance exists in urban areas. In 2006, there were 19,904

28 Stephen Wegren, "The Rise, Fall and Post-Soviet Transformation of the Rural Social Contract," (report, National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER), Washington, DC, 13 July 2002), 8–9, [http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2002\\_816\\_14\\_Wegren.pdf](http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2002_816_14_Wegren.pdf)

29 Waldemar Biniecki and Maria Legieć, "The Fourth Russia," *Kuryer Polski*, 12 April 2022, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://kuryerpolski.us/en/Page/View/czwarta-rosja>

30 Yury Lobunov, "Russia's Strange Acceptance of the Sewage Pit," *New Eastern Europe*, 16 April 2019, retrieved on 27 June 2023, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/04/16/russias-strange-acceptance-of-the-sewage-pit/>

31 Hugh Seton-Watson et al., "Russia: Government and Society: Education," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2023, retrieved on 10 July 2023, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Government-and-society#toc38625>

32 Hellmut Wollmann and Elena Gritsenko, "Local Self-government in Russia: Between Decentralisation and Recentralization," in *Federalism and Local Politics in Russia*, ed. Cameron Ross and Adrian Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 26–27, <http://amor.cms.hu-berlin.de/~h0598bce/docs/HW-EG-2007-Local-Self-Government-Russia.pdf>

33 Vladimir Gel'man, "Chapter 2: Politics, Governance, and the Zigzags of the Power Vertical: Toward a Framework for Analyzing Russia's Local Regimes," in *Russia's Regions and Comparative Subnational Politics*, William M. Reisinger, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 28–30.

rural municipalities. Citizens directly elect local councils (predstavitel'nyj organ). A “head of administration” (glava administratsii) or city administrator, who is directly elected, heads each council.<sup>34, 35</sup>

## Checkpoints

Military checkpoints are in place along Russia’s numerous borders with other countries. Russia has more than 400 relatively modern border checkpoints, established in the 1990s. Lines at border crossings tend to be long, and inspections can last from 20–30 minutes to several hours. Violating border-crossing regulations in Russia is a criminal offense that can result in time in prison. After Russia annexed Crimea, 12 border checkpoints opened; as of 2023, all have closed, and all 39 border crossings between Ukraine and Russia are closed due to Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine. U.S. citizens, especially those in Ukrainian cities and territories under Russian military control, should exercise extreme caution before evacuating by land through Russia-occupied Crimea or to Russia. Review the travel advisories for Russia before attempting to cross any border due to reports of arbitrary detentions by the Russian military at border crossings and checkpoints.<sup>36</sup>

Checkpoints along Russia’s roads are commonplace, particularly on the outskirts of most cities. The purpose of the checkpoints is to detect narcotics, human trafficking, and firearms violations, but in some cases, such checkpoints allow police to collect “fines” from drivers. If this occurs, a driver should record the officer’s name, badge number, patrol car number, and time and date and report the incident to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General.<sup>37</sup>

## Landmines

Russia is one of several countries that continue to produce landmines and refuses to sign the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. The Russian government acknowledges the utility of antipersonnel mines for its national security. Russia has made at least ten types of antipersonnel mines since 1992, although the government claims to have ended the production of blast mines in 1997. The government reports they have stockpiled about 26.5 million antipersonnel devices. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has landmined approximately 170,000 sq km (65,637 sq mi) of Ukraine, making it about the size of the U.S. state of Florida and the most extensive minefield in the world. Russian forces have also placed landmines in the Crimea region, some of its republics, and along its borders with Georgia and Tajikistan.<sup>38, 39</sup>

34 Hellmut Wollmann and Elena Gritsenko, “Local Self-government in Russia: Between Decentralisation and Recentralization,” in *Federalism and Local Politics in Russia*, ed. Cameron Ross and Adrian Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17–18, retrieved on 10 July 2023, <http://amor.cms.hu-berlin.de/~h0598bce/docs/HW-EG-2007-Local-Self-Government-Russia.pdf>

35 Irina Turgel, “New Local Self-government Reform in Russia: A Step to Decentralization or Consolidation of Vertical Authority?” (paper, 16th NISPAcee Annual Conference ‘Public Policy and Administration: Challenges and Synergies’, 2008, 15 May 2008), retrieved on 10 July 2023, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2231414](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2231414)

36 Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Russian Federation,” 23 February 2023, retrieved on 10 July 2023, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/RussianFederation.html>

37 Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Travel Advisory: Russia – Do Not Travel” 23 February 2023, retrieved on 10 July 2023, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Browse/Report>

38 Cédric Pietralunga and Emmanuel Grynszpan, “An Area the Size of Florida has been Landmined by Russia in Ukraine,” *Le Monde*, 14 June 2023, retrieved on 10 July 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/06/14/an-area-six-times-larger-than-belgium-has-been-land-mined-by-russia-in-ukraine\\_6031533\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/06/14/an-area-six-times-larger-than-belgium-has-been-land-mined-by-russia-in-ukraine_6031533_4.html)

39 Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, “Georgia Mine Action,” 12 November 2018, retrieved on 10 July 2023, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2020/georgia/mine-action.aspx>

Thousands of landmines are also located in the region of Chechnya (just north of Georgia), which has had a long history of rebellion. After Chechnya declared independence, Russia invaded in 1994, and periods of warfare have since followed. Both Chechen rebels and Russian forces have planted landmines regularly.<sup>40, 41</sup>

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40 Valentinas Mite, "Russia: Land Mines Kill, Injure More in Chechnya Than Anywhere Else," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 11 September 2003, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1104319.html>

41 Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, "Russia: Mine Action," 19 November 2018, retrieved on 10 July 2023, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2022/russian-federation/mine-action.aspx>

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Rural Life Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | The standard of living in Russia's countryside has increased steadily since the fall.  | True | False |
| 2. | Many people own virtual rather than actual plots of agricultural land.   | True | False |
| 3. | In the Soviet era, the government put minimal effort into building road infrastructure.  | True | False |
| 4. | When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the central state continued to provide needed medical supplies and equipment to remote areas. | True | False |
| 5. | Because many villages have had to merge services, most schools in rural areas are large.   | True | False |

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Rural Life Assessment Answers

1. False:  
The standard of living in the countryside has fallen since 1991. The transition to a more market-based economy has hurt farms and villages.
2. True:  
The government divided state-owned properties into virtual plots of equal size, and each adult who had previously worked on the collective received one land share.
3. True:  
The effects of this policy continue today, especially in rural areas, where the roads are often unpaved and in disrepair.
4. False:  
After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the central state stopped providing needed medical supplies and equipment to remote areas.
5. False:  
Although 70% of all Russian schools are in rural areas, most are small. The average rural school has only 113 students.

## Chapter 6 | Family Life



Bride accompanied by her family  
Flickr/Dmitry Boyarin

### Introduction

Russia's fertility rates declined for decades, reaching below-replacement levels and bringing profound social and cultural changes. However, birth rates have increased in recent years partly because of new family policies, including financial incentives for having a second child, childcare benefits, and improved maternity leave. Still, with fewer women entering their childbearing years, it is unclear whether the trend is sustainable.<sup>1</sup>

There have been significant shifts in family structure and family values since 1991. According to recent surveys, more than 90% of Russians say their primary goal is to start a family and raise good children. Nearly half believe the ideal family includes a lifelong marriage, a stay-at-home mother, and respect for elders. In reality, however, many people are falling short of these goals. Russians are waiting longer to marry. In 2022, only about one in five marriages is between people under the age of 24. Most Russians are likely to postpone marriage until they are between the ages of 25 and 34.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half of Russian marriages fail, resulting in one of the highest divorce rates in the world. Russia's birthrate is rising after years of being below replacement levels. But, many of these children

<sup>1</sup> Statista, "Number of Marriages Registered in Russia in 2022, By Groom and Bride's Age," 7 September 2023, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1034194/russia-number-of-marriages-by-age-and-gender/#:~:text=Number%20of%20marriages%20in%20Russia%202022%2C%20by%20age%20and%20gender&text=The%20majority%20of%20marriages%20in,a%20bride%20of%20that%20age.>

(23%) are born out of wedlock, particularly in Siberia and the Urals. These trends and other changes in Russian society have led to more family breakups and weakened ties.<sup>2</sup>

## Typical Household and Family Structure

Russian families are patriarchal in structure. Russians regard men as the family breadwinners, and they often leave domestic and childcare responsibilities to women. Even though younger couples increasingly prefer a more equitable distribution of responsibilities, traditional gender roles persist in which stay-at-home wives are a status symbol.<sup>3</sup>

### Exchange 35: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	zdyes zheevyot vaashaa syemyaa?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 35

The average number of children born per woman declined dramatically from 7.5 in 1920 to 1.8 in 2022. In 2021, Russia's average household size stood at 2.46 people, marking a 0.4% decline compared to the previous year. Over the decade from 2010 to 2021, this indicator decreased by 6.1%. Notably, the average household size in Russia was at its highest in 2010 and hit its lowest point in 2021 during this period.<sup>4</sup> Both rural and urban couples tend to marry later in life, and the birthrate remains low.<sup>5</sup>

### Exchange 36: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	eta fsyaa vaashaa syemvyaa?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 36

## Status of Women, Children, and the Elderly

### Women

The social status of women, influenced by the communist ideology of gender equality, has changed since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 and subsequent economic turmoil. Patriarchal traditions are resurging. Traditional views suggest that women should stay home and care for their families. Women continue to bear significant responsibilities for the home, even if they work. Women are being encouraged to stay at home and to have more children. New policies have been enacted to increase maternity leave benefits and financially help families with two or more children.<sup>6</sup>

2 Andrey Borodaevskiy, "Families Under Strain: Realities of Post-Socialist Russia" (paper, n.d.), 1–3, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm12/PAPER-BORODAEVSKIY.pdf>

3 Michele Rivkin-Fish, "Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of 'Maternity Capital,'" *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 701–24.

4 Global Data, "Average Household Size in Russia," 2022, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.globaldata.com/data-insights/macroeconomic/average-household-size-in-russia-2096129/#:~:text=Size%20in%20Russia,-Russia%20had%20an%20average%20household%20size%20of%202.46%20people%20in,2021%2C%20between%202010%20and%202021>.

5 The Moscow Times, "Russian Women are Getting Married 8 Years Later on Average, Official Data Says," 24 September 2019, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/09/24/russian-women-are-getting-married-8-years-later-official-data-says-a67411>

6 Oban International, "International Women's Day 2022: Spotlight on women in Russia," 21 February 2022, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://obaninternational.com/blog/international-womens-day-2022-spotlight-on-women-in-russia/#:~:text=The%20income%20gap%20between%20men,eventually%20equates%20to%20lower%20pensions>.

Women are often economically disadvantaged and paid less than their male counterparts. About 32% of women are unemployed. Although women are more likely to live in poverty and cope with the effects of economic disruptions, they appear better able to deal with these problems. Women are healthier and happier than Russian men, a state attributed to their social connections outside the workplace.<sup>7, 8</sup>

Domestic violence against women in Russia is a serious problem. Domestic abuse is still widely regarded as a private issue, with many believing that a woman brings ill-treatment upon herself. Data suggest that as many as 14,000 women die annually from family violence, and nearly 65% of homicides are related to domestic violence.<sup>9</sup>

### Exchange 37: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	vy vyRaslee zdyes?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 37

## Children

Despite the low fertility rate and small family sizes, Russians value families, parenthood, and children. Children often hold positions of honor and privilege in a family, and parents and grandparents indulge them. Russians are often quick to come to children's aid and usually take on the role of parents, praising or scolding children who are not their own.<sup>10</sup>

The national constitution protects the rights of children. However, poor coordination among various legal, federal, and local agencies creates a disconnect between reality and constitutional protections. The poor economic conditions have added to the problems, with authorities failing to implement many proposed programs because of budgetary constraints. Children under the age of 18 may work, but the government restricts the nature and type of that work. Russian children typically get a job around the age of 16. The burdens of bureaucracy and paperwork required to hire minors have made employers reluctant to hire children for any work. Agriculture is an exception, and farmers often call children out of school to help with the harvests, usually without pay and without registering the children as laborers of the agricultural cooperatives.<sup>11</sup>

Criminal organizations sell and illegally traffic children in Russia, many for sexual exploitation or as slave labor. Nearly 70,000 young women and children are trafficked annually. Russian human trafficking law is complicated and contains a series of loopholes, placing children at risk.<sup>12</sup>

Poverty has particularly affected rural children. Children have little access to books and toys, and their homes may lack heat and running water. Educational funding has declined, leaving rural children little opportunity for schooling.

7 A. Golovina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, ed. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 423.

8 Janet Elise Johnson, *Gender Violence in Russia: The Politics of Feminist Intervention* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 55.

9 Kay Rollins, "Putin's Other War: Domestic Violence, Traditional Values, and Masculinity in Modern Russia," 3 August 2022, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://hir.harvard.edu/putins-other-war/>

10 A. Golovina Khadka, "Russians," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, eds. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 419.

11 Peter Roudik, "Children's Rights: Russian Federation," Law Library of Congress, 26 July 2012, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/child-rights/russia.php>

12 Peter Roudik, "Children's Rights: Russian Federation," Law Library of Congress, 26 July 2012, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/child-rights/russia.php>

Infant and child mortality rates are among Eastern Europe's highest.<sup>13</sup> Children are vulnerable to malnutrition, disease, and drug or alcohol addiction. They are also subject to the psychological stress of living on the streets or in institutions and of being displaced by war, conflict, or domestic violence.<sup>14, 15</sup>

### Exchange 38: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	deta vaashee dyetee?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 38

## Status of Older Adults

Older adults in Russia have traditionally occupied an essential position in the extended, interdependent rural household. Charged with caring for children and helping with household chores, grandparents were appreciated for contributing to the younger generations' needs and sharing in family life. Families were traditionally responsible for eldercare, and few elderly persons went to nursing or retirement homes. Even in 2023, many associate going to such a facility with shame and humiliation. Many older Russians refuse to go to nursing homes, viewing them as places of loneliness and unhappiness.<sup>16</sup>

Recently, grandparents' roles have declined because many young people leave the countryside. Many older adults in rural areas are on their own, living alone without access to transportation or healthcare. They may have to walk long distances to the nearest town to obtain supplies or medications. Some may have a small pension and supplement their diet with the food they grow in their gardens. Many are in ill health. Several succumb to alcoholism, which is rampant among Russia's rural population.<sup>17</sup>

### Exchange 39: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	oo vaas yest bRaatyaa?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 39

Because the life expectancy of men in Russia is lower than that of women, many villages consist almost entirely of older women. The rate of alcoholism is much lower among women. Observers believe that this factor alone contributes significantly to women's longer life spans; researchers believe alcoholism is responsible for a high number of male deaths in Russia. In some villages, a social worker may periodically visit to offer basic assistance to the women and family members from out of town who may visit occasionally.<sup>18</sup>

13 Euronews with AFP, "UNICEF: 4m more children in poverty in eastern Europe and Russia due to war and inflation," 17 October 2022, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/10/17/child-poverty-surge-in-eastern-europe-and-russia-due-to-ukraine-war-and-inflation-says-uni>

14 UN News, "Ukraine War Linked to 'Massive Malnutrition Crisis' Affecting Millions in Other Emergencies," 7 April 2022, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115762>

15 James Rodgers, "Putin Boom Passes Ru,al Russia By," BBC News, 29 February 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7269431.stm>

16 Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Insufficient Home Services for Older People," 24 August 2021, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/24/russia-insufficient-home-services-older-people>

17 Meduza, "Russia's Elderly Live Rough Lives, and The State Offers Almost No Help, But Officials Say Everything is About to Change," 21 September 2018, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2018/09/22/russia-s-elderly-live-rough-lives-and-the-state-offers-almost-no-help-but-officials-say-everything-is-about-to-change>

18 Tatiana Kossova et al., "Gender Gap in Life Expectancy in Russia: The Role of Alcohol Consumption," in *Social Policy and Society*, 2020, no. 19 (1), 37-53, retrieved on 5 February 2024, [https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/abs/gender-gap-in-life-expectancy-in-russia-the-role-of-alcohol-consumption/CB2D305CB18AFF14E93BB0EDAA3DDC84?utm\\_campaign=shareaholic&utm\\_medium=copy\\_link&utm\\_source=bookmark](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/abs/gender-gap-in-life-expectancy-in-russia-the-role-of-alcohol-consumption/CB2D305CB18AFF14E93BB0EDAA3DDC84?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=bookmark)

# Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

## Marriage

Recent studies show that many Russians still believe in marriage and value both the institution and family relations. An overwhelming 93% of Russians view marriage as necessary for women. Despite the value placed on family, recent demographic changes and modernization have taken a toll on families in the Russian Federation. Approximately 22% of Russian households are single-member households, and single mothers head nearly 23% of all households. Households without children account for 28%, as more couples remain childless. Russians increasingly choose to cohabitate rather than marry, and fewer couples eventually marry.<sup>19</sup>

### Exchange 40: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	vy zhyenaaty?
Local:	No.	Nyet

Exchange 40

### Exchange 41: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	eta vaashaa zhyenaa?
Local:	Yes.	daa

Exchange 41

## Divorce

Attitudes toward divorce, once unheard of, have changed in recent years.<sup>20</sup> There is no longer a stigma attached to divorce; only 12% of Russians feel couples must save their marriages regardless of the cost.<sup>21</sup> At 3.9 divorces per 1,000 people, Russia has the world's third-highest divorce rate, which continues to rise.<sup>22</sup> Both parties have the right to seek a divorce in Russia, although men may not institute divorce proceedings while a wife is pregnant or for one year after the birth of a child. Russians file divorce requests with the registry office, where authorities dissolve the marriage immediately if the request is uncontested and there are no minor children. Otherwise, a marriage court must hear the case.<sup>23</sup> When authorities grant a divorce, whichever parent is no longer living in the household must pay child support. An ex-wife can claim spousal support if she is pregnant or raising a young child (under three). If either spouse is disabled or close to retirement after a long marriage, that spouse qualifies for support.<sup>24</sup>

19 Anatoly G. Vishnevsky, "1. Family, Fertility, and Demographic Dynamics in Russia: Analysis and Forecast," in *Russia's Demographic Crisis*, 2 February 2024, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/CF124.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF124.html)

20 Statista, "Number of Marriages and Divorces per 1,000 Population in Russia From 2000 to 2022," 22 August 2023, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1009719/russia-marriage-and-divorce-rate/>

21 E.I. Pakhomova, "Marriage and Divorce: What Has Changed in the Perceptions of Russians?" *Russian Education and Society* 5, no. 5 (May 2009): 37–38.

22 Wisevoter, "Divorce Rate by Country: Russia," 2023, retrieved on 11 August 2023, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://wisevoter.com/country-rankings/divorce-rate-by-country/#:~:text=Countries%20With%20Highest%20Divorce%20Rate.-The%20countries%20with&text=Guam%20follows%20in%20second%20place.3.8%20divorces%20per%201%2C000%20people>

23 Russian Federation, "The Family Code of the Russian Federation: No. 223–FZ of December 29, 1995: Chapter 4: Termination of the Marriage" (approved by the State Duma, Moscow, 8 December 1995), retrieved on 5 February 2024, <http://www.jafbase.fr/docEstEurope/RussianFamilyCode1995.pdf>

24 Expatica, "Living in Russia: Getting a Divorce in Russia," 8 January 2024, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.expatica.com/ru/living/love/getting-a-divorce-in-russia-1167457>

## Birth

Babies are welcome in most Russian families, especially because of the population decline, yet nearly one-third of all children are born to unmarried women.<sup>25</sup> Medical care and services for pregnant women are among the most poorly developed in Russia's health industry. Many women suffer from anemia and poor nutrition, which can cause problems during birth, and only about 20% of children are born healthy.<sup>26</sup> Even though skilled healthcare professionals attend virtually all births, maternal death rates are still relatively high in Russia.<sup>27</sup> The highest rates are in the North Caucasus, Siberia, and the far eastern part of the country. The lowest rates are in the central and northern European regions. Dissatisfaction with the care provided in maternity hospitals, coupled with the cost, is prompting more women to have their children at home attended by a midwife or sometimes by a physician.<sup>28</sup>

Until recently, Russian women tended to have their children in their early to mid-twenties, but there is a developing trend to delay pregnancy.<sup>29</sup> The government offers several incentives to encourage women to have more than one child. One of the most important is a payment of approximately USD 13,000 for a second or third child.<sup>30</sup> The programs appear somewhat successful, and the Russian birthrate has risen slightly since 2008.<sup>31</sup>

New parents often keep their babies in relative isolation for the first month after birth. About 40 days after the birth, parents may hold a party, or *smotriny*, inviting friends and relatives to see the newborn. Guests commonly bring gifts for the baby and money, which they place under the newborn's pillow.<sup>32</sup>

## Family Social Events

### Weddings

The most popular time for Russian weddings is from the end of Orthodox Easter through the end of summer. Slavic pagan rites are combined with official church rites to form a complicated ritual that often takes place on a grand scale and for which families often borrow money, even taking out bank loans. Brides wear elaborate white dresses with long veils. Couples invite as many friends and relatives as possible, believing that the more guests there are, the longer and happier the marriage will be.<sup>33</sup>

25 Sergey Arzhenovskiy and Anna Dudkina, "Modern Family: Life Values and Attitudes of the Population," in *Recent Economic Crisis and Future Development Tendencies (7th International Conference of Association of Economic Universities of South and Eastern Europe and the Black Sea Region, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 6–8 October 2011)*, 170, retrieved on 5 February 2024, [http://www.asecu.gr/files/proceedings\\_7th\\_conference.pdf#page=170](http://www.asecu.gr/files/proceedings_7th_conference.pdf#page=170)

26 Julie DaVanzo and Clifford Grammich, "Dire Demographic Trends Cast a Shadow on Russia's Future," Rand Corporation, 16 September 2010, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB5054/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB5054/index1.html)

27 Marina P. Shuvalova, et al., "Maternity Care in Russia: Issues, Achievements, and Potential," retrieved on 2 February 2024, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26606698/>

28 Ekaterina Belousova, "The Preservation of National Childbirth Traditions in the Russian Homebirth Community (1)," *Slavic and East European Folklore Association (SEEFA) Journal VII, no. 2 (2002): 51–54*, <https://journals.ku.edu/index.php/folklorica/article/viewFile/3724/3565>

29 Central Intelligence Agency, "Russia: People and Society," *The World Factbook*, 5 February 2024, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

30 Statista, "Value of Maternity Capital Benefits Paid by the Government in Russia From 2007 to 2023," 22 August 2023, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1023323/russia-maternal-capital-benefits/>

31 Jenni Reid, "Russia is offering a hero's medal and \$16,000 to women who have 10 kids," *CNBC*, 18 August 2023, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.cNBC.com/2022/08/18/russia-offers-mother-heroine-medal-and-16800-for-having-10-children.html>

32 ProQuest, "Russia," *CultureGrams Online Edition*, 2024, retrieved on 5 February 2024.

33 Valerie Nikolas, "The Complete Guide to Russian Wedding Traditions," *The Knot*, 13 January 2023, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.theknot.com/content/russian-wedding-traditions>

After the ceremony, guests shower the newlyweds with seeds, hops, or coins. Couples must register civil or religious marriages with the registry office. Church weddings are becoming increasingly popular, and many believe church weddings are particularly blessed.<sup>34</sup>

#### Exchange 42: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	zhelaayoo vam schaastya
Local:	We are honored.	dmvy vaam oochen pReeznaatyelne

Exchange 42

Following the church service and before the reception, tradition dictates that the couple pays its respects at an important historical or cultural site such as the Kremlin, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, or the statue of Peter the Great. The reception commonly occurs in a restaurant, a large hall, or a private home. The groom's parents receive the couple, and the groom's mother often gives the newlyweds bread and salt. The bride and groom eat the bread together, and Russians playfully assume that the person who eats the more significant portion will be the head of the household.<sup>35</sup>

#### Exchange 43: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	pazdRavlaayoo s-bRakaasochetaneeyem!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	pachtyom zaa chyest vaashye pReesootstveeye

Exchange 43

## Funerals

Modern funeral traditions vary, but most follow certain rituals. Family members gather around the deathbed. A priest hears the last confession and offers Communion. If a person dies before confessing, the priest performs *panikhida*, an abridged funeral repeated on the third, ninth, and fortieth day after death. Families must arrange a requiem at the church.<sup>36</sup>

Before burial, the body is washed and dressed in a simple white garment and a belt. The body remains in the home for three days before being placed in a coffin. Many Orthodox Russians lay the body with the head facing the icon corner in the house, although Old Believers place the feet facing the icon corner. Before the burial, generally, on the third day after death, family members place items considered useful or valuable in the coffin to accompany the soul on its journey.<sup>37</sup> After the ceremony, guests return to the deceased's family's home to enjoy a feast. They make toasts, usually with vodka, clinking glasses as they toast one another and say farewell. A place is set at the table with black bread and vodka for the departed.<sup>38</sup>

On the ninth day, some Russians believe that the soul has reached God's throne, and they hold a memorial service (*panikhida*). Days 9–40 are a time of judgment, during which the fate of the individual is decided. On the 40th day, the soul receives the preliminary judgment of its fate until the final judgment. Each year, on the anniversary of the

34 Anna Pavlovshaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 131.

35 Expatica, "A Russian Wedding: Traditions, Ceremonies, and Paperwork," 8 January 2024, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.expatica.com/ru/living/love/getting-married-in-russia-104069/>

36 Andrew Louth, "Chapter 12: Eastern Orthodox Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 239.

37 Sam Tetrault, "Russian Funerals: Traditions, Customs & What to Expect," 14 May 2022, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.joincake.com/blog/russian-funeral/>

38 Anna Pavlovshaya, *Culture Shock! Russia: A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish, 2011), 132–33.

death, the family holds another *panikhida* to mark the deceased's new birthday in eternity. In cities, Russians often practice cremation because of high burial costs.<sup>39</sup>

**Exchange 44: I would like to give my condolences.**

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	yaa bvy Khatyel vyRaazeete svoee cabaly-eznavaaneeeyaa vaam ee vaashyee syemye
Local:	Thank you.	Spaaseeba

Exchange 44

**Exchange 45: Please be strong.**

Soldier:	Please be strong.	dyeRzheetyes
Local:	We will try.	mvy pastaaRaayemsyaa

Exchange 45

## Naming Conventions

Russian names consist of three parts. First is the assigned name, or first name. The middle (patronymic) name consists of a name taken from the father's first name and a suffix designating gender. If the child is male, parents add *-vich* or *-ovich* to complete the name (as in the name *Ivanovich* for the son of Ivan). If the child is female, they add *-avna* or *-ovna* to complete the name (as in the name *Ivanovna* for the daughter of Ivan). The person's third name is the surname or family name.<sup>40</sup>

In formal situations, acquaintances or business associates should address Russians using all three names. Casual friends may use the first and middle names: Russians regard it as a sign of respect to use an individual's first and patronymic names. Family members and close friends use only first names for one another.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Michel Bouchard, "Graveyards: Russian Ritual and Belief Pertaining to the Dead," *Religion* 34, no. 4 (2004): 345–60.

<sup>40</sup> JustRussian.com, "Russian Names," n.d., retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.justrussian.com/russian-names/>

<sup>41</sup> JustRussian.com, "Russian Names," 28 August 2018, retrieved on 5 February 2024, <https://www.justrussian.com/russian-names/>

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Family Life Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- |    |  |      |       |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Russia's government has ignored its population decline.  | True | False |
| 2. | Rural families are generally larger than urban families.   | True | False |
| 3. | The social status of women has increased since the fall of the Soviet Union.                                       | True | False |
| 4. | Older people in Russia traditionally occupy an essential position in the extended, interdependent rural household. | True | False |
| 5. | Russia has one of the highest divorce rates in the world.  | True | False |

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Family Life Assessment Answers

1. False:  
The government has instituted childcare benefits, better maternity leave, and incentives for couples having second children as policies designed to reverse the problem.
2. False:  
Today, urban and rural households are similar in size and composition.
3. False  
Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the social status of women has declined. Employers pay women less than they pay men. Women have higher unemployment rates and remain primary caretakers.
4. True:  
Grandparents frequently help with childcare and other household chores for which they are greatly appreciated.
5. True:  
Russia has the world's third-highest divorce rate.

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Further Readings and Resources

### **Books**

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Batta, Anna. "The Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics." New York: Taylor & Francis, 2021.

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### **Articles and Reports**

Borodaevskiy, Andrey. "Families Under Strain: Realities of Post-socialist Russia." Paper, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. n.d. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm12/PAPER-BORODAEVSKIY.pdf>

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Kassymbekova, Botakoz. "Europe's Last Empire: Putin's Ukraine War Exposes Russia's Imperial Identity," Atlantic Council, 1 February 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/europes-last-empire-putins-ukraine-war-exposes-russias-imperial-identity/>

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Zavetskaya, Margarita and Ekaterina Borozdina. "Here's What Russians Really Think About Gender (In)equality."  
13 March 2019. <https://ridl.io/here-s-what-russians-really-think-about-gender-in-equality/>

# Russian Cultural Orientation

## Final Assessment

“To receive a certificate of completion for this course, please complete the final assessment on the DLIFLC website.”