

The **Russian Federation** was the largest nation to emerge from the break up of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Following the constitutional crisis of 1993, Russia adopted a new constitution in a referendum of December 1993.

The country is described as a **Federal Semi-Presidential Republic**.



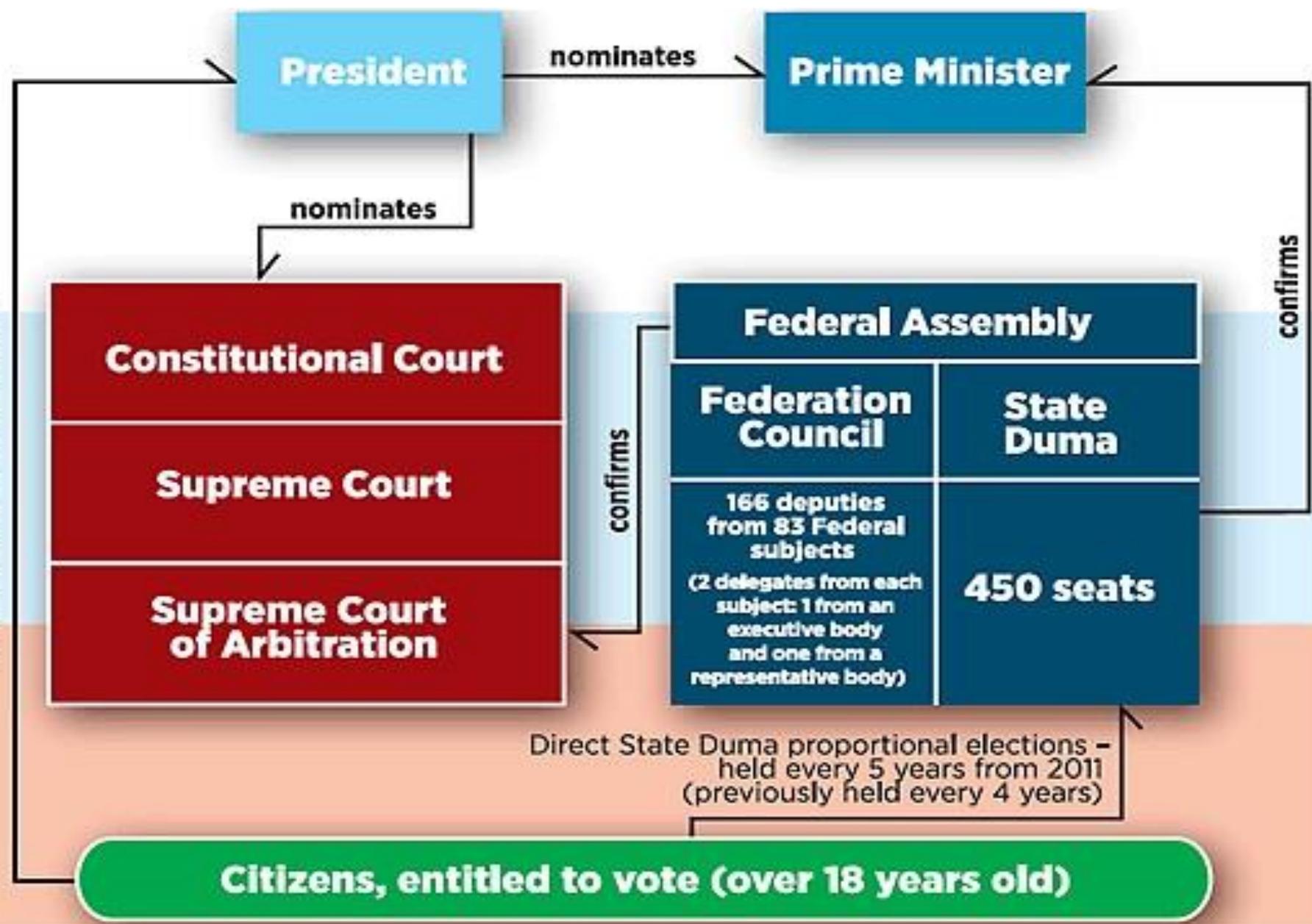


The executive power is split between the President and the Prime Minister, but the President is the dominant figure.

The Prime Minister is appointed by the president of the Russian Federation and confirmed by the **State Duma**. He or she succeeds to the presidency if the current president dies, is incapacitated or resigns. The current prime minister is **Dmitry Medvedev**.

The government issues its acts in the way of decisions and orders . These must not contradict the constitution, constitutional laws, federal laws, and Presidential decrees, and are signed by the Prime Minister.

Direct presidential elections – held every six years from 2012
(previously held every 4 years)



Citizens, entitled to vote (over 18 years old)

Direct State Duma proportional elections – held every 5 years from 2011 (previously held every 4 years)

The government is the subject of the 6th chapter of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. According to the constitution, the government of the Russian Federation must:

1. Draft and submit the federal budget to the State Duma; ensure the implementation of the budget and report on its implementation to the State Duma.
2. Ensure the implementation of a uniform financial, credit and monetary policy in the Russian Federation.
3. Ensure the implementation of a uniform state policy in the areas of culture, science, education, health protection, social security and ecology.
4. Manage federal property.
5. Adopt measures to ensure the country's defense, state security, and the implementation of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation.
6. Implement measures to ensure the rule of law, human rights and freedoms, the protection of property and public order, and crime control.
7. Exercise any other powers vested in it by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, federal laws and presidential decrees.

The first President of the new Russia was **Boris Yeltsin** who was elected in June 1991. He was followed by his hand-picked successor **Vladimir Putin**.

Putin was elected for his first term in May 2000 and for a second term in March 2004. In accordance with the constitution, he stepped down in March 2008 and was succeeded by his nominated successor **Dmitry Medvedev** who was previously a First Deputy Prime Minister.

In March 2012, **Putin** was re-elected as President on the first ballot in a widely criticized election in which the opposition candidates were weak, the media was compliant, and there were many electoral irregularities. He took office in May 2012 and will serve for six years.

Constitutionally Putin could seek one further term and, if elected, would therefore be President until 2024 when he would be 71.



The **President** is head of state of Russia and appoints the Prime Minister, as well as holds the authority to be able to dismiss them and members of their cabinet. The President's working residence is in the **Moscow Kremlin**.

The President determines the basic domestic and foreign policy, is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, can veto legislative bills, resolves issues of citizenship of the Russian Federation, awards state decorations and grants pardons.

Due to Vladimir Putin's authoritarian nature, he has much more power than the Russian constitution actually lets on.



The **Prime Minister** is the head of the domestic government and a member of the State Duma. The current PM is **Dmitry Medvedev**.

The domestic government can also introduce bills but must be passed by the rest of the State Duma, the Federation Council and the President.

They choose their own cabinet but the candidates they have selected must be approved by the President first.

The PM and their cabinet are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the country and lead its various government departments.

The **Federal Assembly** is Russia's national legislature and consists of two chambers with their own roles and powers: the **State Duma** and the **Federation Council**.

The legislature is represented by the **Federal Assembly** of Russia. It has two chambers: the **State Duma** – the lower house, and the **Federation Council** – the upper house.

The **judicial power** is vested in courts and administered by the **Ministry of Justice**.



The **State Duma** is the national legislature, the lower but most powerful house of the Federal Assembly. Any member may be able to introduce a bill and then the State Duma can then vote on it as a collective group. If it passes, it goes to the Federation Council and then the President for approval.

They are able to vote on the President's bills as they must approve by them in order to pass. They vote on the President's wish to initiate a state of emergency or declare war. They also vote for the Prime Minister as a method of approving the President's choice and may file an impeachment case also against the President through a two-thirds majority vote in order to remove them from office.



The Moscow Kremlin (photos by Irina Vasilevitskaya, RT)

The term **Duma** comes from the Russian “**dumat**” (“**to think**”). Compared to some European democracies, the Russian Duma is young. It was founded in 1906, but didn’t survive the **1917 revolution**. It bounced back in 1993, when Russia’s first President, **Boris Yeltsin**, introduced a new constitution.

All bills, even those proposed by the Federation Council, must be considered by the State Duma. Once a bill is passed by a majority in the Duma, a draft law is sent back to the Federation Council. If the Council rejects it, the two chambers may form a commission to work out a compromise.



The White House (photo by Irina Vasilevitskaya, RT)



The **Federation Council** is the upper but least powerful house of Russia's national legislature the Federal Assembly.

This assembly represents the individual governments of Russia's 85 federal subjects; 22 republics, 46 oblasts, 9 kraits, 3 federal cities, 4 autonomous okrugs and 1 autonomous oblast, as a collective body.

Each is represented through two senators but are not elected by the Russian people. Instead, they are appointed by the governments of their federal subjects.

They have the power to either approve or veto bills passed by either the State Duma or President.

The Federation Council also has special powers of its own, including the declaration of a presidential election, impeachment of the President and decisions on the use of the armed forces outside Russia's territory.

Below the central government is the individual regional governments of the **federal subjects** and their systems differ based on what type they are.

Each federal subject has representation on the Federation Council with 2 senators each, as mentioned above. As Russia is a federation, these territories have a degree of self-government.

- **Oblasts** have their own regional governor and legislature.
- **Republics** are incredibly autonomous and have their own constitution and legislature, as well as some representation through foreign affairs.
- **Krais** are the same as oblasts, their names are just different due to historical reasons.
- **Okrugs** are autonomous regions where there is a substantial ethnic minority population.
- **Federal cities** are cities which are not part of any other federal subject and have their own privileges of self-government.
- **Autonomous oblasts** have more power than normal oblasts but there is only one and that is the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, where its population is mostly Jews.

Below the federal subjects, and like in every other country, you have local government, mostly in the form of local councils and known as **municipal divisions** in Russia.

The Russian people elect their own local representatives to these councils to represent their own local interests.



THE JUDICIARY

The **Constitutional Court** of the Russian Federation consists of 19 judges, one being the Chairman and another one being Deputy Chairman. Judges are appointed by the President with the consent of the Federation Council.

The Constitutional Court is a court of limited subject matter jurisdiction. The 1993 constitution empowers the Constitutional Court to arbitrate disputes between the executive and legislative branches and between Moscow and the regional and local governments. The court also is authorized to rule on violations of constitutional rights, to examine appeals from various bodies, and to participate in impeachment proceedings against the President.

Although in theory the judiciary is independent, most observers believe that major elements of the judiciary - together with the police and prosecution authorities - are under the political control of the Kremlin and more specifically Vladimir Putin.

The **Municipal Court** is the lowest adjudicating body in the general court system. It serves each city or rural district and hears more than 90 per cent of all civil and criminal cases.

The next level is the **Regional Court**. At the highest level is the **Supreme Court**. Decisions of the lower trial courts can generally be appealed only to the immediately superior court.

Arbitration Courts are in practice specialized courts which resolve property and commercial disputes between economic agents. The highest level of court resolving economic disputes is the High Court of Arbitration.

The judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Higher Arbitration Court are appointed by the parliament's upper house, the Federation Council.



POLITICAL PARTIES

The main political party is **United Russia** and led by Dmitry Medvedev. It describes itself as centrist, but it is essentially a creation of Vladimir Putin and supports him in the Duma and the Federation Council. In the Duma election of December 2011, United Russia's share of the vote fell by 15% to just over 49% and the number of its deputies fell by 77 to 238. However, in the election of September 2016, the party - while winning 54% of the vote - increased its number of seats by 105 to 343.

The main opposition party is the **Communist Party** of the Russian Federation led by Gennady Zyuganov. In the election of 2011, it won 19% of the vote and took 92 seats. At the last Duma election in 2016, its share of the vote fell to 13% its seat count fell by 50 to 42.

The other parties in the Duma are the ultra-nationalist **Liberal Democratic Party** of Russia (led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy) with 39 seats (down by 17) and the fake opposition party **A Just Russia** (led by Sergey Mironov) with 23 seats (down by 41).

CONCLUSION

Russian democracy is most certainly a work in progress with Vladimir Putin remaining a massive influence on the acquisition and exercise of power. Observers describe the current state of the Russian political system as "**managed democracy**" or "**sovereign democracy**" or simply as "**Putinism**". The three political parties not in government are called the "**systemic opposition**".

The most dramatic examples of the iron grip on political power exercised by Putin and his allies are:

- the dismissal of Russia's powerful prosecutor-general Yuri Skuratov in 1999.
- the indictment of Russia's richest oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2003 and again in 2010.
- the unexplained murder of investigative journalist Anna Plitkovskaya in 2006.
- the death in prison of the lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in 2009.
- the imprisonment of the three Pussy Riot members Maria Alyokhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova & Yekaterina Samutsevich in 2012.
- the expulsion from the Duma of opposition deputy Gennady Gudkov in 2012.
- the conviction of opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2013.
- the assassination of leader of the opposition Boris Nemtsov in 2015.



The dominant political clan in Russia is often referred to as the **siloviki**, veterans of the security and military establishment led by Putin himself.

Some believe that there is a more liberal clan focused around Medvedev.

Putin's leadership is still popular among the public outside the major cities, partly because it is seen as restoring Russia's standing after the humiliating collapse of the Soviet Union, partly because it follows in a long historic tradition of strong central leadership stretching from the Tsars and through Stalin.

The political battle lines in Russia are not for or against democracy or corruption; all parties are notionally for democracy but know that it does not exist, while all parties are theoretically against corruption but do nothing to tackle it.

The real battle line is between **centralization** and **regionalism**, that is whether all meaningful power should reside in the Kremlin or whether power should be shared with the regions and major cities.

Vladimir Ryzhkov, a Kremlin opponent and former Duma deputy who lost his seat in 2007 after he was banned from the elections, said of the 2008 extension of the terms for both the President and the Duma:

"This is very negative. It's a clear signal that the regime will be authoritarian and autocratic, and control everything. It's all about keeping power. The tsar was constrained by the aristocracy. The party bureaucracy controlled the general secretary. Today the president controls parliament, the bureaucracy and the security services, as well as oil and gas."

In 2011, the last president of the former Soviet Union **Mikhail Gorbachev** said of the current Russian political system:

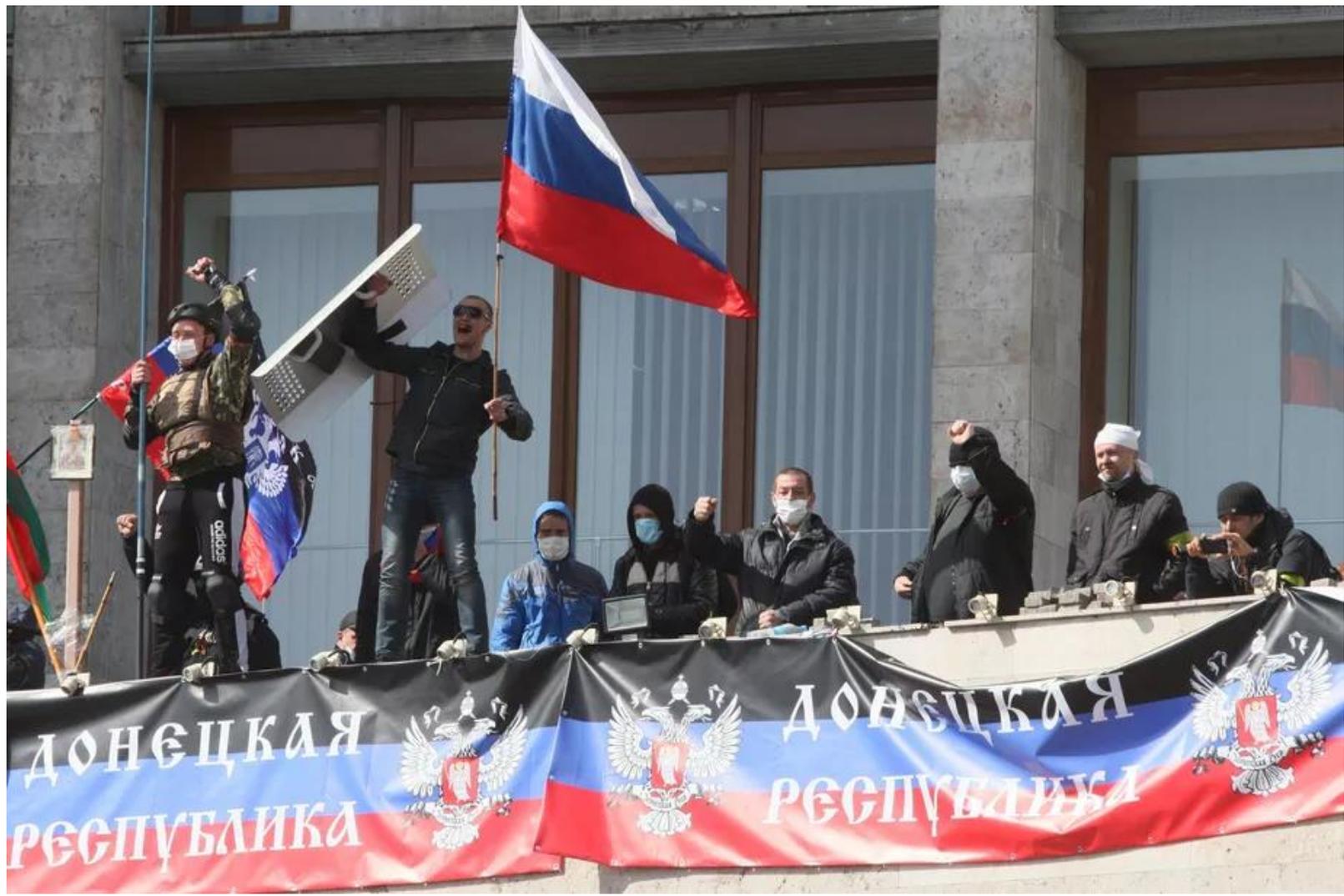
"We have everything - a parliament, courts, a president, a prime minister, and so on. But it's more of an imitation."





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Meanwhile there is an interplay between political and economic forces that is seriously destabilizing Russia. The nation's recent occupation of the Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine has resulted in sanctions from the Western nations and there has been a collapse in the price of oil which provides half of the country's exports and funds 40% of the federal budgets.



Pro-Russian protesters wave Russian flags from the main government building in Donetsk, Ukraine. Alexander KHUDOTEPLY/AFP/Getty Images

<http://country-facts.findthedata.com/l/26/Russia#Demographics&s=2YMRF>

<http://www.rogerdarlington.me.uk/Russianpoliticalsystem.html>