RUSSIAN POLITICAL HISTORY

Expansion and defining the other.
EARLY RUSSIA

Mongols, tsars, and serfs.
EARLY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Early factors leading to character of Russian state:

- **Adoption of Eastern Orthodox Christianity** → closer ties to Greece than Rome
  - No Pope → **Caesaropapism**, connection between the political and religious leader

- **Mongol invasion and occupation** in 13th century
  - Population movement from south to north → rise of Muscovite kingdom (Moscow)

- **Isolation** of Russia from Western Europe → no Renaissance, no Protestant Reformation, no strong middle class → despotism?
BUILDING RUSSIA

Ivan the Terrible (1547-84 CE):

- Destruction of regional kingdoms and **consolidation under one leader** (tsar)
- Vast **eastward expansion** → EMPIRE!
- Consolidation of rule with **personal police force** (oprichniki) to suppress political opponents
- Confiscated large estates of boyars who opposed him, redistributed land to supporters
REFORMING THE EMPIRE (?)  
Maybe? Maybe not.
**Romanovs and Rule**

*Romanovs* become ruling family under Mikhail Romanov in 1613
- Son of Russian Patriarch $\rightarrow$ strong *connection between church and state*

Central question of Romanov rule: *"Is Russian Western? Or is it something else?"

- **Peter the Great** (1689 – 1725) $\rightarrow$ Westernization
  - Capital moves farther west (St. Petersburg, Western military practices)
- **Nicholas I** (1825 – 1855 CE) $\rightarrow$ NOPE
  - Hostile to the West $\rightarrow$ travel illegal

Modernization was inconsistent at best.
MIGHT AS WELL BE FRANCE. Not baroque enough for you?
DEFINITELY NOT FRANCE.

Not very Western.
Tension between agrarian, aristocratic society, highly autonomous state, and traditional monarchy

- **Russo-Japanese War (1904-5 CE)** → National embarrassment, evidence of lack of Russian modernity
- Series of **protests in 1905** by workers force Tsar Nicholas II to share power → **creation of the Duma**
- World War I → exacerbated national tensions rather than creating national unity

**Tsar forced to abdicate in March 1917**

- Weak, ineffective provisional government takes his place

Taking advantage of the national disorder, **Vladimir Lenin** and followers staged a coup d’etat in October 1917 → **Bolshevik Revolution**
THE SOVIET UNION

Пролетарии всех стран, соединяйтесь!
**MARX AND LENIN**

**Marxist-Leninist thought:**
- Embraces the idea of the **vanguard party** (and therefore **one-party state**)
- **Rejects the idea that world revolution had to occur BEFORE building socialism in Russia**
- Rejects the idea of a gradual transition from capitalism to socialism

**Lenin’s ruling policies:**
- Local authority (under **soviet**, rather than local councils) limited
- Authority concentrated in one party → controlled all state and non-state activity, **no alternative political parties or private media**
- **Secret police force** → Cheka (later KGB) organized to control dissent and oversee surveillance
GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Complicated, yes?
Joseph Stalin (1878 – 1953 CE):

- Came to power after Lenin’s death, quickly consolidated power over the party-state
- Created a totalitarian regime
- Eliminated any remaining remnants of private property (collectivization), crash industrialism
- Opposition to state authority → disappearance, death, or imprisonment (gulags)
- Use of cult of personality
FAILURE OF THE COMMUNIST STATE

Stalinist brutality + bureaucratic inefficiencies + failure to provide goods and services = reform

- Attempts (unsuccessful) at reform under Khrushchev → forced out by the Politburo in 1964

By the 1980s, clear that the USSR had fallen deeply behind

- New political thinkers (Gorbachev among them) emerge with goals of transforming the state
- Glasnost & perestroika → idea was that a limited rollback of state would encourage citizen participation and limit corruption of the nomeklatura

Ideas of reform were uncontrollable by Soviet regime:

- Spread of nationalist ideas among minority groups
- Attacks of corruption and incompetence

August 1991 → attempted coup d'état by anti-reform forces against Gorbachev fails, army refuses to back the coup