



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

Putin's Russia and the Soviet Inheritance

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** From Late Soviet Stagnation to Post-Soviet Flux
- **Chapter 2** The KGB Legacy and the Security-State Mindset
- **Chapter 3** Building the Power Vertical: Centralization as Strategy
- **Chapter 4** Managed Democracy: Elections as Ritual
- **Chapter 5** Parties of Power and the Marginalization of Opposition
- **Chapter 6** Courts, Law, and the Instrumental State
- **Chapter 7** Federalism Rewired: Regions, Governors, and Control
- **Chapter 8** Oligarchs, State Capitalism, and the Commanding Heights
- **Chapter 9** Media Capture: From Oligarchic TV to State Narratives
- **Chapter 10** Propaganda 2.0: Digital Ecosystems and Disinformation
- **Chapter 11** Memory Politics: History as a Tool of Rule
- **Chapter 12** Church and State: Orthodoxy and National Identity
- **Chapter 13** Security Services Ascendant: Siloviki in Governance
- **Chapter 14** The Social Contract: Stability, Paternalism, and Fear
- **Chapter 15** Repression by Law: NGOs, "Foreign Agents," and Civil Society
- **Chapter 16** Military Reform and the New Way of War
- **Chapter 17** Energy, Pipelines, and the Geopolitics of Leverage
- **Chapter 18** The Near Abroad: Post-Soviet Space as Sphere of Influence
- **Chapter 19** Europe and the United States: Cycles of Conflict and Accommodation
- **Chapter 20** Ukraine: From Orange Revolution to Full-Scale War
- **Chapter 21** Syria, Africa, and Power Projection Beyond the Neighborhood
- **Chapter 22** Cyber Operations and the Information Battlespace
- **Chapter 23** Sanctions, Substitution, and Economic Adaptation
- **Chapter 24** Elite Politics, Succession Scenarios, and Regime Durability
- **Chapter 25** Futures of the Russian State: Continuities, Contingencies, and Change

Introduction

This book argues that to understand contemporary Russia under Vladimir Putin one must start by taking its Soviet inheritance seriously. Institutions do not vanish when flags change; they mutate, adapt, and persist in habits of mind, networks of careers, and the everyday practices of administration and coercion. The story told here is neither one of simple continuity nor of clean rupture. Instead, it is a tale of path dependence and strategic improvisation, in which post-Soviet volatility provided the raw material for rebuilding an order that feels familiar even as it employs twenty-first-century tools. The result is a governing system that blends Soviet legacies with market mechanisms, new media, and global interdependence to project stability at home and influence abroad.

The Soviet party-state left behind more than archives and monuments. It bequeathed an ethos: the primacy of security, the instrumental use of law, the subordination of institutions to political will, and a deep suspicion of autonomous society. The security services, the bureaucracy's command habits, and the performative dimension of elections were not so much erased in the 1990s as reconfigured amid privatization, oligarchic struggles, and constitutional experimentation. Under Putin, these elements were recentralized into a "power vertical" that promises order, offers selective prosperity, and polices the boundaries of permissible pluralism. This architecture does not operate as a static machine; it is a living system that rewards loyalty, punishes defection, and learns from shocks.

Media control illustrates this dynamic of adaptive inheritance. Where Soviet censorship relied on a single-party monopoly, the contemporary system works through ownership structures, regulatory chokepoints, and narrative management that coexists with formal market competition and a noisy internet. The objective is not to suppress all counterarguments but to saturate the information space with frames that make alternative accounts appear marginal, treacherous, or absurd. Historical memory—especially of the Second World War—functions as a legitimating resource, linking national pride to present-day policy and casting dissent as ingratitude. The Russian Orthodox Church, while not a Soviet institution, has been integrated into this symbolic economy, reinforcing themes of tradition, sovereignty, and social conservatism.

Foreign policy, too, reflects inherited instincts refracted through new conditions. The conviction that Russia is a great power with privileged interests in its neighborhood predates the Kremlin's current occupants, as do anxieties about encirclement and regime security. The application of these ideas since the early 2000s has combined classic tools—diplomacy, energy leverage, arms sales—with updated methods:

targeted cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, and the deployment of expeditionary forces under legal and humanitarian pretexts. From the 2008 war in Georgia to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the pattern reveals a state willing to accept international costs to reshape its regional environment and to harden domestic consensus through conflict.

At home, political economy binds governance and geopolitics. State capitalism concentrates strategic assets in loyal hands, enabling the leadership to direct investment, cushion shocks, and mobilize resources for priority projects. The same logic shapes the “social contract”: citizens receive stability, selective welfare, and national prestige in exchange for political quiescence. Law operates both as policy instrument and as boundary marker—clarifying who may organize, speak, or receive funding—while courts arbitrate within limits set by higher imperatives. Civil society persists, but under legal designations that stigmatize independence, narrowing the space for advocacy while preserving the appearance of normal institutional life.

This book is written for analysts, students, and general readers who seek a historically grounded framework rather than a catalogue of headlines. Its central claim is analytic, not deterministic: Soviet legacies structure incentives and repertoires, but actors still make choices within and against those constraints. Understanding how those choices are framed—by institutions, narratives, and external pressures—helps explain both striking continuities and moments of surprising change. The purpose is neither to excuse nor to condemn, but to clarify how the system works and why it often behaves as it does.

Methodologically, the chapters synthesize scholarship from history, political science, sociology, and media studies with primary materials: official speeches and legal texts, budgetary and corporate data, military doctrine, and fieldwork-based accounts. Where sources are contested or opaque—as in the operation of security services or casualty reporting—the analysis triangulates across independent datasets and treats certainty with caution. Readers will find normative judgments kept separate from empirical claims, and where inference is necessary, the reasoning is made explicit. The aim is transparency about limits as well as findings.

The book proceeds in four arcs. Chapters 1–7 trace the reconstruction of the state from late Soviet stagnation through post-Soviet turbulence to the consolidation of the power vertical. Chapters 8–15 examine instruments of domestic control: the political economy of state capitalism, media capture, propaganda, memory politics, religion, and the legal architecture governing civil society. Chapters 16–23 analyze the evolution of military power, hybrid warfare, energy leverage, regional interventions, cyber operations, and the politics of sanctions and adaptation. Chapters 24–25 turn to elite dynamics and possible futures, considering how succession scenarios, external shocks, and societal change might reshape the system—or reproduce it in altered form.

If there is a through line to the pages that follow, it is that continuities matter most when they are mobilized creatively. What looks like a throwback is often an innovation built from old parts; what seems novel frequently rests on familiar assumptions about authority, identity, and threat. By mapping these layers—governance, propaganda, and foreign policy—onto their historical foundations, the book offers a toolkit for interpreting events beyond the news cycle. In doing so, it invites readers to test the framework against new evidence and to consider how legacies can constrain, enable, and—on rare occasions—be overcome.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: From Late Soviet Stagnation to Post-Soviet Flux

The late Soviet Union did not collapse so much as exhale, and then brace itself for a long winter it could no longer quite control. By the time the 1980s limped into view, the system had accumulated a patina of rituals that outstripped their results. Congresses convened, five-year plans were drafted, and leaders traded pins and slogans, all while the machinery beneath them spooled down. The stagnation—*brezhnevskoe zamedlenie*—was less a sudden brake than a gentle fade, like a streetlamp flickering at dusk, convincing passersby for a time that night had not yet arrived. People learned to read between the lines of official life, cultivating a talent for distinguishing what was promised from what would materialize. That talent would survive the regime itself and prove useful in the decades ahead.

Economic sclerosis arrived with diplomatic courtesies, concealing its severity behind growth rates that looked plausible only in aggregate. Central planners continued to shuffle columns in search of balance, but the columns themselves had grown unruly. Investment drifted toward sectors that generated paperwork rather than goods, and the vaunted military-industrial complex, though fearsome on paper, consumed resources that might have lubricated civilian life. Inventories piled up in warehouses while store shelves learned new arts of emptiness. The gap between plan and practice became a chasm that citizens crossed daily with practiced ease, bartering favors, skills, and patience. Institutions adapted by becoming less like levers of control and more like clearinghouses for negotiation.

The countryside wore its decline with a particular dignity. Collective farms clung to names that rang with revolutionary optimism even as they functioned as elaborate props for a system running on inertia. Machinery aged gracelessly, and the workforce aged with it, knowing that loyalty bought fewer comforts than it once had. Urban factories echoed their rural counterparts, their rhythms set by deliveries that came too late or not at all. Workers learned to improvise, slipping into secondary economies that planners preferred not to see. These parallel circuits did not overthrow the system; they kept it stumbling forward, like a bicycle that must keep moving to stay upright.

Ideological language lingered like wallpaper applied over cracks. Slogans about progress and justice remained on parade routes and newspaper mastheads even as cynicism seeped into kitchens and workshops. The vocabulary of struggle persisted while the objects of struggle grew elusive. Party functionaries mastered the art of sounding certain while meaning nothing in particular, a skill that would migrate smoothly into new careers. Language itself became a form of insulation, protecting

speakers from the cold winds of reality. Over time, speaking in stale phrases signaled not conviction but prudence.

Mikhail Gorbachev entered this world promising motion without catastrophe. Perestroika carried the whiff of renovation, suggesting that the structure could be refurbished without tearing down load-bearing walls. Glasnost, with its pledge of candor, opened windows that let in drafts no one quite knew how to close. For a moment, optimism felt less like naivety than like good sense. Newspapers discovered adjectives they had not known they possessed, and citizens found themselves arguing in public with an unfamiliar liberty. The system appeared to be learning how to speak a new language, even as its throat grew hoarse from the effort.

Yet the attempt to reform institutions while preserving their essence produced paradoxes that piled up like stalled traffic. Laws loosened while habits stayed tight, and economic permissions arrived before the skills to use them. Cooperatives sprouted like mushrooms after rain, charming at first and then disquieting as they hinted at larger rearrangements. Regional leaders, sensing opportunity, began to treat loyalty like a currency with variable exchange rates. The center still commanded respect, but its commands traveled more slowly and returned with contradictory reports. Everyone claimed to be implementing policy while quietly rewriting it.

Nationality policy, long treated as a solved problem, unclenched its grip and revealed tensions that had been compressed rather than resolved. Republics that had learned to mouth unity began to rehearse difference, dusting off languages and symbols that had been decorative for decades. The myth of the Soviet people as a finished product fractured along lines that had been there all along but politely ignored. Local elites, sensing weakness in Moscow, tested the boundaries of permissible speech and action. The federal architecture, built to withstand pressure, began to creak in ways that sounded like warning.

The August 1991 coup was less a dramatic reversal than a bungled punctuation mark in a story that had already changed the subject. Plotters who hoped to freeze time succeeded only in accelerating it. Their tanks and decrees looked antique against the backdrop of a world that had grown skeptical of strongmen. Resistance sprang up with the makeshift quality of a neighborhood watch, improvised and determined. When the coup collapsed, it took with it the illusion that the old order could be preserved by force. The spell was broken not with a bang but with a shrug.

By the time the Soviet flag lowered over Red Square, the country had already been living in the post-Soviet moment for months. The end arrived quietly, like a lease expiring, leaving occupants to decide what to keep and what to toss. Institutions that had seemed immutable revealed themselves to be arrangements of habit and ambition. The people who had managed them did not vanish; they repositioned themselves, carrying files, grudges, and practical knowledge into a landscape that was

suddenly up for grabs. Continuity persisted in the form of faces, routines, and unwritten rules.

For ordinary citizens, the early post-Soviet years felt less like liberation than like mislaid luggage. Guarantees evaporated overnight, and the future arrived without an instruction manual. Hyperinflation turned savings into curiosities, and the ruble behaved like a moody roommate. People developed a knack for living in provisional circumstances, treating jobs, housing, and even relationships as temporary by nature. The art of the hustle, long practiced in shadow, became a mainstream skill. Stability, once taken for granted, came to look like a luxury item.

Privatization created winners and losers with a speed that blurred the line between fortune and theft. Voucher privatization promised a people's capitalism and delivered something more chaotic, as vouchers circled like lottery tickets in a game where odds shifted hourly. Insider deals flourished in the half-light of new laws that had not yet learned to walk. Former directors became owners, and ownership became power. The economy acquired new names for old patterns, and legitimacy came to be measured in deeds rather than decrees.

Crime adapted to the new market with entrepreneurial zeal. Bandits organized themselves with corporate discipline, and businessmen hired protection with the same care they gave to accounting. The distinction between state and underworld blurred into a shared language of interest. Police, underpaid and under-supervised, learned to navigate this terrain with pragmatic ethics. Informal hierarchies hardened into structures that looked suspiciously like authority. Power was no longer just political; it was logistical.

Regional governors emerged as pivotal actors, bargaining with a distant center that needed their cooperation more than it cared to admit. They collected taxes, issued licenses, and kept peace—or at least kept violence manageable. Some built fiefdoms that resembled small states, complete with flags, budgets, and courts that smiled on friends. Moscow struggled to assert a line between federal authority and local prerogative, often settling for arrangements that favored functionality over principle. The map of Russia became a mosaic of negotiated sovereignties.

At the same time, a cultural carnival of contradiction unfolded in public spaces. Consumer goods flooded markets with a garish abundance that promised choice without guaranteeing wisdom. Billboards, television, and new glossy magazines sold not just products but identities, suggesting that Russians could remake themselves with the right shampoo or car. The old asceticism gave way to a brash materialism that felt both foreign and familiar, imported dreams packaged in domestic kitsch. People laughed at the excess and bought in anyway.

The 1990s parliament, a stage for shouting and posturing, showcased democracy as a

contact sport rather than a system. Factions formed around personalities more than programs, and sessions often resembled talk shows with better lighting. The legislature passed laws that were ignored, amended, or forgotten, while the executive acted through decrees that had more force than statutes. This separation of word from deed trained citizens to treat politics as performance, a lesson that would resonate in calmer times.

Media, newly unshackled, experimented with freedom in ways that ranged from exuberant to reckless. Newspapers printed rumors alongside reporting, and television chased audiences with sensationalism that blurred news and entertainment. Oligarchs discovered that owning outlets was cheaper than advertising in them. Narratives multiplied, and consensus fractured, creating a cacophony in which it became harder to agree on basic facts. The information space became a battlefield before anyone had coined the term.

Public opinion careened between euphoria and resentment, embracing the West as a model one month and denouncing it as a thief the next. Intellectuals debated whether Russia was normalizing or losing its soul, while most people focused on getting through the week. The concept of the people as a collective actor grew fuzzy, replaced by individuals pursuing private strategies. Society seemed to atomize even as new forms of association flickered to life.

The presidency, meanwhile, consolidated authority in ways that looked constitutional on paper but bespoke in practice. Boris Yeltsin, perched above the scrum, learned to play institutions against each other, using crises to extract compliance. His battles with parliament established a template for executive assertiveness that would be refined later. The electorate, exhausted by disorder, increasingly valued stability over contestation, even as it grumbled about the price. Democracy began to feel like a seasoning rather than the main dish.

By the close of the millennium, Russia had not become a failed state, but it had become a state that failed to match its own billing. It was sovereign, uneven, and rich in resources, yet uncertain about what it stood for. Institutions existed in layers, some Soviet, some improvised, some imported and ill-fitting. This sedimented reality provided the substrate for what would come next, a foundation that looked chaotic from above but felt navigable to those who knew where to step.

The turn of the century did not arrive with a manifesto. Instead, it crept in on the heels of exhaustion, promising less drama and more management. The public, having survived a decade that felt like a crowded, smoky room, began to crave fresh air and clearer rules. Political entrepreneurs sensed that the mood favored order over experimentation, and they adjusted their pitches accordingly. The era of improvisation was not ending, but its characters were changing costumes.

This transition set the stage for a leader who understood that authority could be rebuilt by combining old habits with new tools. The late Soviet inheritance had left behind not blueprints but repertoires—ways of doing things that could be repurposed. Post-Soviet flux had taught that power could be assembled from loyalty, law, economic leverage, and narrative control. The next chapter of Russian governance would draw on these lessons, layering them into a system that felt coherent precisely because it made use of so much that had come before.

The chaos of the 1990s was not forgotten so much as filed away, referenced when convenient and ignored when unhelpful. The late Soviet period lingered in institutional memories, shaping expectations about what authority looked like and how it should behave. Together, these layers created a kind of institutional bricolage, in which old parts were used to build new machines that worked better than they looked. The result was a state that could promise stability without quite promising freedom, and that could deliver both at a price.

In this environment, governance became as much about managing perceptions as managing resources. The line between state and society, never sharply drawn, grew even more permeable as networks of influence replaced formal hierarchies. What emerged was not a return to the Soviet past but a selective revival of its methods, seasoned with market logics and updated for a media age. The country was learning to govern itself with a toolkit that was eclectic, effective, and uneasy about its own contradictions.

Russia in these years was a society of second-guessers, expert at reading signals and surviving turbulence. That skill would prove useful in the decades ahead, as the state grew more deliberate and citizens grew more practiced at navigating its contours. The late Soviet inheritance and post-Soviet flux fused into a working arrangement, pragmatic rather than principled, durable rather than elegant. And somewhere in the midst of this arrangement, a new formula for rule began to take shape, setting the terms for what was to come.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit [MixCache.com](https://mixcache.com) to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY