

AP Euro Final DBQ Prompt: Evaluate how Putin's administration changed Russia politically and economically in the post-Cold War era.

Documents:

Document 1

Source: Article about Russia's economy under Putin, by journalists Ben Aris and Ivan Tkachev, published in the English-language Russian newspaper *The Moscow Times*. August 19, 2019.

Putin was responsible for the first systematic attempt to reform Russia's economy. In 2000 he launched the so-called Gref plan ("Programme for the Socio-Economic Development of the Russian Federation for the Period 2000-2010"), named after the then economics minister and now Sberbank CEO German Gref. But the plan was abandoned when the 2008 crisis struck when it was only 30% complete. There was a lot of stealing during Putin's first term in office, but real progress was made, leaving Russia's economy far ahead of the rest of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). ... There was no growth under Yeltsin. The economy contracted for a decade. But that changed suddenly and dramatically after Putin took over.

Document 2

Source: Article about Russia's economy under Putin, by Swedish economist Anders Åslund, for the U.S.-based institution the Peterson Institute for International Economics. August 31, 2018.

When Putin became president in 2000, he continued the "second generation" market reforms that had been formulated in 1996-97, and thanks to his newlywon parliamentary majority he could legislate them as Yeltsin never could. The three years from 2000 to 2002 were characterized by

progressive economic reforms. Most impressive was the comprehensive, radical tax reform. The progressive personal income tax, peaking at 30 percent, was replaced with a flat income tax of 13 percent as of 2001. The corporate profit tax was reduced from 35 to 24 percent in 2001. Far more important was that most ordinary business costs became deductible, leveling the playing field. Social security contributions were cut from a flat rate of 39.5 percent of the payroll to an average rate of 26 percent. Tax collection was unified in one agency. Small-scale tax violations were decriminalized. The tax reforms reduced the threat to businessmen posed by tax inspection.

Document 3

Article on the authoritarianism of Putin's Russia, by Soviet-born American sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh, published in a University of California academic journal. December 2007.

The ability of an Orwellian society to bend the will of individuals and force them to change their minds is well known. Putin's Russia, however, has proved that not only a harsh totalitarian state, such as the Soviet Union, but also a somewhat milder, authoritarian regime is able to achieve almost the same result. Such a regime can threaten to diminish the income, privileges or social status of prominent people. By murdering or jailing only a few active people (businesspeople, journalists and politicians), the regime can show its potential opponents that everyone in the country is vulnerable. Looking back on Stalin's time, one cannot help but think that he could have achieved his goals and stayed in power until his death without using such horrendous acts of violence.

Document 4

Article on the authoritarianism of Putin's administration, by Soviet-born American former army colonel Alexander Vindman and Soviet-born American chess grandmaster and political activist Garry Kasparov, published in American newspaper *The Washington Post*. March 22, 2021.

The sixth anniversary, on Feb. 27, of the murder of another Russian opposition leader who fought for a vision of a free and democratic Russia — Boris Nemtsov — provides a sobering reminder of the Putin regime's willingness to shamelessly eliminate opponents. President Biden's calling Vladimir Putin a "killer" on Wednesday is being portrayed in some quarters as provocative when it is simply accurate.

Document 5

Article on Putin's one-man authoritarian rule, by American journalist Gregory Feifer, published in American magazine *The New Republic*. March 20, 2020.

Putin is taking no chances on the appearances of his latest ploy to extend his rule over Russia. In a speech to the nation's Duma last week, he took pains to sound reluctant in backing a constitutional amendment to reset his term limits ... "The president is the guarantor of security of our state, its internal stability and evolutionary development," he said. "We've had enough revolutions." Parliament passed the legislation hours later; three days after that, Russia's highest court decreed the amendment constitutional.

Now the path is all but clear for the 67-year-old former KGB officer to rule until 2036, when he will be 83. That would give him a tenure of 36 years, one more than Josef Stalin's.

Document 6

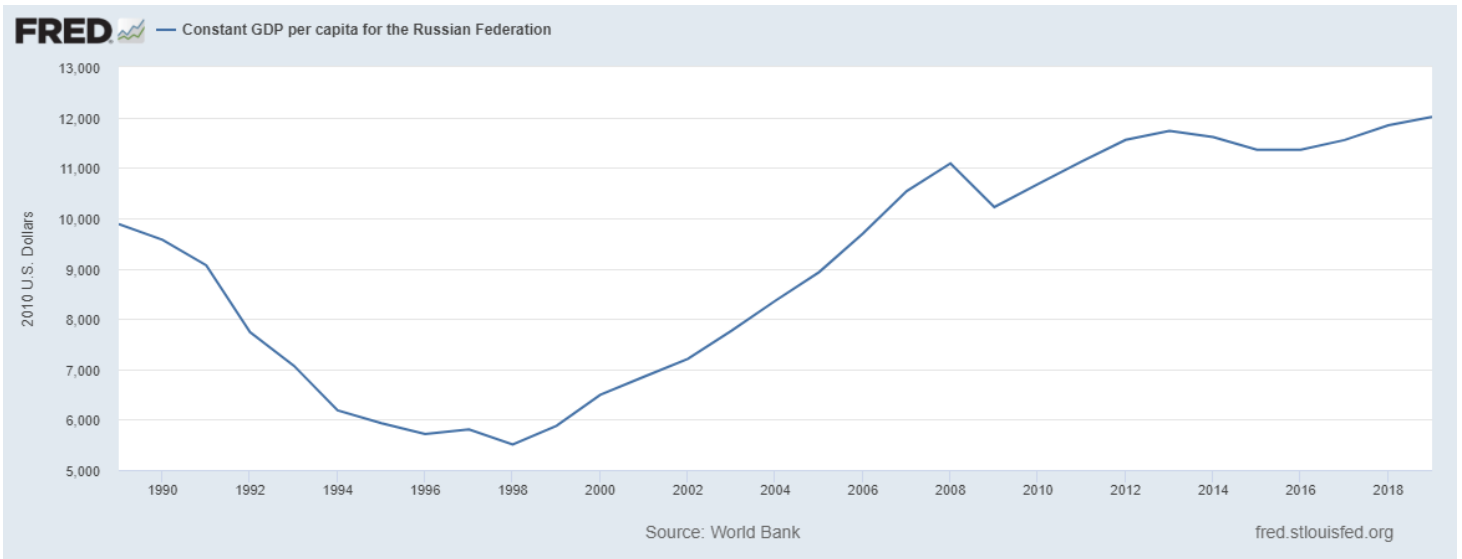
Source: Russian-language political cartoon depicting Putin, by Russian cartoonist Sergey Elkin, published in Russian-language version of German newspaper *Deutsche Welle*. July 4, 2019.



*The text reads, “When are you going to retire from politics?”

Document 7

Source: Graph of Russia’s GDP per capita from 1989 to 2019 created by FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, using data from the World Bank. July 2, 2020.



*The line represents GDP per capita. Putin's presidencies: 1999-2008 and 2012-present.

AP Euro Final DBQ Response: Evaluate how Putin's administration changed Russia politically and economically in the post-Cold War era.

The Soviet Union, or the USSR, was a socialist state comprised of many nations. By far the largest and most powerful of the nations within the Soviet Union was the Soviet Republic of Russia, which exerted its influence over the other nations of the USSR as well as non-USSR Eastern Bloc countries. In 1989, an economic crisis as well as political revolts sparked anti-communist revolutions across the USSR and Eastern Bloc. Russia, itself dealing with revolution, didn't attempt to stop these revolutions. Eventually, communism would come to an end in Russia, and the Soviet Republic of Russia would become the Russian Federation. The USSR was dissolved in 1991. The first president of the Russian Federation, from 1991 to 1999, was the liberal Yeltsin, who attempted to reform both Russia's economy and its politics along

liberal democratic lines. The second (from 1999-2008) and later the fourth (from 2012 to the present) president of Russia was Vladimir Putin. Economically, Putin's administration liberalized Russia, but in terms of politics, his government maintained Russia's longstanding tradition of authoritarianism.

In terms of economics, Putin's administration improved and accelerated the process of liberalization that had begun with the founding of the Russian Federation. When the country came into being, it was led by the liberal-leaning Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin's administration implemented a policy of rapid privatization known as "economic shock therapy." This policy changed Russia's economy rapidly from a centrally planned system to a deregulated free market, which led to economic failure and oligarchs amassing a huge amount of wealth. In Document 1, an article about Russia's economy under Putin by journalists Ben Aris and Ivan Tkachev, the authors describe the effectiveness of Putin's economic Gref plan. They state that Russia's economy had been shrinking for a decade under Yeltsin, but "changed suddenly and dramatically after Putin took over." They concede that there was stealing during Putin's first term in office, but go on to assert that real progress was made and that Russia's economy advanced ahead of the rest of the former USSR. The purpose of this article is to describe how the Russian economy fared under Putin and his administration. The POV of the article is that of journalists writing in a newspaper based in Russia, so they do not criticize the government too much. This article supports the conclusion that Putin brought liberal reforms to Russia's economic system, and that these reforms expanded the economy. In Document 2, an article about Russia's economy under Putin by Swedish economist Anders Åslund, the author details Putin's economic reforms. He states that Putin could legislate reforms "as Yeltsin never could", and lauds Putin's "comprehensive, radical tax reform" (reducing taxes). The purpose of this article is to explain

Putin's economic reforms. The POV of the article is that of a Swedish economist who works for the U.S.-based financial institution the Peterson Institute for International Economics, and whose work focuses on transitions from centrally planned to market economies. He also advocates for free-market policies, which makes him biased in favor of Putin's pro-market reforms. However, this article does support the conclusion that Putin liberalized and improved the Russian economy. In Document 7, a Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis graph of Russia's GDP per capita from 1989 to 2019, GDP per capita is shown to reach its lowest point in 1998 but then sharply rebound in 1999, when Putin came to power. The purpose of this graph is to objectively show the GDP per capita of the Russian federation, and by extension the health of the Russian economy. The POV of the graph is not pro-Russian, as it was made by an American government institution using data from a U.S.-based international financial institution. This data supports the idea that Putin's liberalization policies increased Russia's GDP. To sum up this paragraph, Putin liberalized Russia's economy and made it into a functioning free market system.

Politically, Putin's administration returned to some degree to the authoritarian tradition of the socialist USSR and the Tsarist Russian Empire. In Document 3, an article on the authoritarianism of Putin's Russia by Soviet-born American sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh, the author describes Putin's administration as less brutal than the USSR but still authoritarian. He says, "The ability of an Orwellian society to bend the will of individuals and force them to change their minds is well known. Putin's Russia, however, has proved that not only a harsh totalitarian state, such as the Soviet Union, but also a somewhat milder, authoritarian regime is able to achieve almost the same result." With this description, he does not praise Putin, but simply puts him in perspective to the totalitarianism of Stalin. He continues, "By murdering or jailing only a few active people (businesspeople, journalists and politicians), [Putin's] regime can

show its potential opponents that everyone in the country is vulnerable.” The purpose of this article is not to commend Putin, but to realistically compare his rule to Russian governments throughout history. The POV of this article is not pro-Russian, as the author left the Soviet Union and moved to the U.S. This article supports the conclusion that Putin’s administration, while not totalitarian, is authoritarian. In Document 4, an article on the authoritarianism of Putin’s administration by Alexander Vindman and Garry Kasparov, the authors denounce Putin’s administration. They cite the killing of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov as a “sobering reminder of the Putin regime’s willingness to shamelessly eliminate opponents.” They go on to declare, “President Biden’s calling Vladimir Putin a ‘killer’ on Wednesday is being portrayed in some quarters as provocative when it is simply accurate.” The purpose of this article is to denounce Putin and his officials for ordering the deaths of political opponents. The POV of this article is anti-Russian, as both authors left the USSR for the United States, are anti-authoritarian political activists, and are against Putin’s administration. However, this article provides evidence for the argument that Putin is an authoritarian leader. In Document 5, an article on Putin’s one-man rule by American journalist Gregory Feifer, the author describes how Putin justified resetting his term limits. Putin is quoted as saying “We’ve had enough revolutions.” The author draws parallels between Putin and Stalin, stating, “Now the path is all but clear for the 67-year-old former KGB officer to rule until 2036, when he will be 83. That would give him a tenure of 36 years, one more than Josef Stalin’s.” This comparison highlights the similarities between Putin and Stalin’s long autocratic regimes. The purpose of this article is to show how Putin stays in power and avoids term limits year after year. The POV of this article is that of an American journalist who is biased against Russia. In Document 6, a political cartoon by Russian cartoonist Sergey Elkin, Putin is depicted taking a question from a journalist. The journalist asks,

“When are you going to retire from politics?” Putin does not respond, but he is portrayed as rooted firmly in the ground, like a tree. This is a visual metaphor for Putin staying “rooted” to power, refusing to relinquish his personal authority. It is also a reference to Putin refusing to say whether or not he will step down from the presidency when his current term expires in 2024. The purpose of this cartoon is to show Putin as a semi-dictatorial leader who refuses to acknowledge term limits. The POV of this cartoon is that of a cartoonist who, though Russian, is published in a German newspaper. This allows him to criticize Putin more than a journalist published in Russian media. This cartoon supports the conclusion that Putin’s administration is authoritarian and autocratic in nature. Another example of Putin’s authoritarianism not mentioned in any documents is his administration’s assassination of Anna Politkovskaya. Anna Politkovskaya was a Russian journalist who criticized Putin and his administration. She was arrested and harassed by the government many times, and was assassinated in 2006. Her killing was almost definitely an act of retaliation by someone in Putin’s administration. This supports the idea that the Putin-led Russian government uses violence against political opponents. To sum up this paragraph, Putin’s administration definitively shows traits of authoritarianism and one-man rule.

To conclude, Putin’s administration maintained authoritarian political rule in Russia, but promoted economic liberalization. Another example of a time in Russian history in which the economic system changed but the government remained authoritarian was the October Revolution of 1917. The October Revolution was led by the Marxist Bolshevik movement against the democratic Provisional Government established after the fall of the Tsarist regime in the February Revolution. While the Tsarist government was well known for its brutality and frequent massacres of peasants, the Bolsheviks did not put an end to this oppression. Discounting the short-lived Provisional Government, Russia went from one oppressive regime to another.

Millions died as a result of the USSR's forced collectivization policies, and hundreds of thousands more were directly executed by the USSR. While the October Revolution did change the economic system of Russia, it didn't change the totalitarian nature of Russia's government. Similarly, while the fall of the Soviet Union destroyed its central economy, its undemocratic political structure was preserved and resurrected in Putin's administration.

Works Cited

- Aris, Ben, and Ivan Tkachev. "Long Read: 20 Years of Russia's Economy Under Putin, in Numbers." *The Moscow Times*, The Moscow Times, 19 Aug. 2019, www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/08/19/long-read-russias-economy-under-putin-in-numbers-a66924.
- Åslund, Anders. "An Assessment of Putin's Economic Policy." PIIIE, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 31 Aug. 2018, www.piie.com/commentary/speeches-papers/assessment-putins-economic-policy.
- "Constant GDP per Capita for the Russian Federation." *FRED*, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2 July 2020, fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NYGDPPCAPKDRUS.
- Elkin, Sergey. "Почему для Путина не стоит вопрос о 2024 году (Why the question of 2024 is not for Putin): DW: 04.07.2019." *DW.COM*, Deutsche Welle, 4 July 2019, www.dw.com/ru/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BC%D1%83-%D0%B4%D0%BB%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%82-%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81-%D0%BE-2024-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5/a-49475579.
- Feifer, Gregory. "Putin Is Perfecting His Authoritarian Model." *The New Republic*, The New Republic, 20 Mar. 2020, newrepublic.com/article/156987/putin-perfecting-authoritarian-model.

Shlapentokh, Vladimir. "How Putin's Russia Embraces Authoritarianism: The Case of Yegor Gaidar." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4, Dec. 2007, pp. 493–499. *University of California Press*, University of California, www.jstor.org/stable/48609681.

Vindman, Alexander, and Garry Kasparov. "In Russia, It's Not Navalny vs. Putin. It's Democracy vs. Authoritarianism." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 22 Mar. 2021, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/22/russia-its-not-navalny-vs-putin-its-democracy-vs-authoritarianism/.