

New Nation-States from the Old Soviet Empire: Will They Succeed?

18.1 Introduction

“Iron Felix” Dzerzhinsky was a brutal man. Under his direction, hundreds of thousands of people were killed in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The revolution destroyed the old **empire** of Russia. In its place rose a new empire called the Soviet Union.

The new government chose Iron Felix to set up a secret police force. Its job was to destroy all opposition. The secret police arrested millions of people who were suspected of being disloyal. A statue of Dzerzhinsky in a Moscow square reminded people that the police were always watching.

By 1991, people had had enough. An angry crowd attacked the statue of Iron Felix. They cheered wildly as the symbol of fear came down. By year’s end, the government had fallen as well. The Soviet Union was no more.

Fifteen new **nation-states** were formed out of the ruins of the Soviet empire. The term *nation-state* combines two ideas. The first, **nation**, refers to a group of people who share a common history and culture. Another term for people with such a shared identity is **ethnic group**. The second, **state**, refers to a political unit that controls a fixed territory. A nation-state is a country whose people mostly share a common identity.

In this chapter, you will read about the Soviet Union and five of the new nation-states that replaced it. And you will find out what makes a new nation-state likely to succeed or fail.

Essential Question

What factors contribute to the success or failure of new nation-states?

This illustration names 5 of the 15 new nation-states that came out of the old Soviet Union. Their success will depend on both economic and political factors. Keep this illustration in mind as you try to answer the Essential Question.

Graphic Organizer





Voting in a New Nation-State

Every year an organization called Freedom House rates countries on how free they are. Freedom House looks at how well a country protects two kinds of rights. The first is political rights, such as the right to vote or run for office. The second is civil rights, including the right to speak and worship freely. Freedom House rates a country as free, partly free, or not free.

18.2 The Geographic Setting

The Soviet Union was a vast country. It covered more than half of Europe and nearly two fifths of Asia. In area it was almost two and a half times the size of the United States. It had the third largest population in the world. Only China and India had more people.

From Superpower to Failed State From 1945 to 1990, the Soviet Union was one of the world's two great **superpowers**. (The United States was the other.) Its armed forces were the largest in the world. For much of this time, it led the world in exploring space.

In 1991, this superpower collapsed. That year, the Soviet Union became the world's largest **failed state**. The question is why. One way to answer this question is to compare the Soviet Union with a successful nation-state.

Features of Successful Nation-States Many factors affect the success of a nation-state. But five are very important. They are security, political freedom, economic growth, quality of life, and national unity.

The most important job of a nation-state is to keep its people safe. A successful state can protect its people from foreign enemies. Its police work to keep people safe from crime. As you read, in the Soviet Union, the secret police made people feel less, not more, secure.

A successful nation-state protects the rights and freedoms of its citizens. In a free country, the people choose their leaders. Elections are honest and fair. People vote freely without fear of arrest. Elected leaders usually have strong public support. In contrast, the Soviet Union was ruled by **dictators**. These are leaders who govern by force without the people's consent.

A successful nation-state uses its resources and location to promote economic growth. Its **gross domestic product** (GDP) rises over time. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a country. As GDP rises, incomes rise. As incomes rise, poverty declines. In the Soviet Union, GDP rose slowly or not at all.

A successful nation-state also tries to improve its people's quality of life. It works to provide its people with safe food, clean water, and good medical care. As people live healthier lives, **life expectancy** increases. Also, fewer babies die in their first year. In the Soviet Union, however, quality of life was not improving for many people.

Successful nation-states inspire patriotism, or love of country. People who love their country work to make it succeed. Successful nation-states also inspire **nationalism**, or feelings of pride and loyalty toward one's nation. In countries like the Soviet Union with many ethnic groups, nationalism can create a sense of unity.

However, ethnic group nationalism can sometimes work against national unity. By 1991, ethnic loyalty in the Soviet Union had more support than loyalty to country. At this point, many ethnic groups had decided that they would be better off as independent nation-states than as part of a failing Soviet Union.

► Geoterms

ethnic group a group of people in a country who share a unique culture and identity

nation a large group of people who share a common history and culture. Not all nations have their own government or control a territory. But in common use, the word *nation* often means a country or nation-state.

nationalism feelings of loyalty and pride toward one's nation or ethnic group. Nationalism sometimes includes the belief that one's nation or group is better than all others.

nation-state an independent state, or country, whose people mostly share a common identity

state a political unit that controls a particular territory

A Diverse Region

More than 100 ethnic groups lived in the Soviet Union at the time of its collapse. This map shows the major ethnic groups that were in various areas. Conflicts among ethnic groups helped bring about the collapse of this state.

Major Ethnic Groups in the Soviet Union



A Kazakh Herdsman

For centuries, the Kazakhs were mainly nomads, people who move from place to place. They raised sheep, goats, cattle, and horses for meat, wool, and hides. They traveled hundreds of miles each year in search of pasture for their herds. A few Kazakhs still follow this ancient way of life.



18.3 Kazakhstan: A Central Asian Giant

Kazakhstan is a Central Asian giant surrounded by other giants. To the southeast lies China. To the north lies Russia. To the west lies the Caspian Sea.

An Arid Land with Many Resources Much of Kazakhstan is too **arid** for agriculture. But many crops are grown in the northern region and some irrigated areas in the south. Its people also raise cattle, goats, poultry, pigs, and sheep.

Kazakhstan is rich in minerals. It has large deposits of coal, lead, copper, iron, and zinc. Some of the world's largest oil reserves lie under the Caspian Sea. Oil production is a major part of the country's economy.

In the future, oil will become even more important. This is due to Kazakhstan's location between China and the Caspian Sea. Once pipelines are built across the country, oil will flow from the Caspian Sea to oil-thirsty cities of China.

Ethnic Conflicts Create a Split The Kazakhs are the main ethnic group in Kazakhstan. They make up about half of the nation's population. Russians make up about a third of the population. Most Kazakhs are Muslim. Most Russians are Christian. Religious and cultural differences divide the groups.

Most Russians live in northern Kazakhstan. Under Soviet rule, heavy industry developed in the north. Many Russians still work in these industries. Most Kazakhs live in the south. This settlement pattern has created a serious north-south split in the country.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan faces serious environmental problems. Under Soviet rule, poor irrigation methods damaged farmland. **Pesticides** seeped into the water supply. Factories released **toxic waste**. The Soviets also carried out secret nuclear testing. As a result, many people still suffer serious health problems.

Looking ahead, Kazakhstan's survival will depend on several factors. One is using its resources wisely to raise incomes. Another is solving its environmental problems and improving the quality of life. A third is calming the ethnic unrest, or conflict among ethnic groups, that divides the country. If it can succeed at all three, its future may be bright.

18.4 Azerbaijan: Where Europe Meets Asia

Together, the new nation-states of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan are known as the Caucasus. That's because the steep Caucasus Mountains tower over them. This region is one of the world's great crossroads, where Europe meets Asia. Azerbaijan's location and resources hold the key to its future.

A Country Rich in Oil Azerbaijan has huge deposits of oil. Oil is its greatest source of wealth and its number one export. The capital city of Baku, on the shore of the Caspian Sea, is the center of its oil industry.

Azerbaijan lies between Iran and Russia. During Soviet rule, oil pipelines were built to send all of Azerbaijan's oil to Russia. When the Soviet Union collapsed, so did its hold on Azerbaijan. The new country was then free to sell its oil anywhere.

Since 1991, Azerbaijan has signed agreements with many foreign oil companies. Pipelines are being built to move its oil to customers outside of Russia. Working with foreign oil companies is not easy. But if Azerbaijan succeeds in opening new markets for its oil, its future looks bright.

Ethnic Warfare Clouds the Future One obstacle to progress is conflict between ethnic groups in Azerbaijan and neighboring Armenia. The Azeris are the main ethnic group in Azerbaijan. They make up over 90 percent of the population. Most Azeris are Muslim. About 2 percent of the population in Azerbaijan is Armenian. Most Armenians are Christians. The Azeris and the Armenians have a long history of conflict.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region within Azerbaijan. Most of the people there are Armenians. They want to be independent from Azerbaijan. In 1992, war broke out over the issue. Thousands of people were killed. Almost a million people fled from the fighting. A cease-fire was called in 1994, but the problem was not solved. The violence continues to this day.



A Wealth of Oil

Oil is Azerbaijan's most important resource. It has enough oil to fill more than 200 billion barrels. One barrel of oil produces about 19 gallons of gasoline.





18.5 Belarus: Between Europe and Russia

The word Belarus means “white Russia.” No one knows for sure why the color is part of the country’s name. It might refer to the snow that often covers the land. It might describe the white bark of the birch trees in its forests. The “rus” part of Belarus reflects its location next to Russia on the east. On the west, it borders Europe.

A Landlocked Country of Many Lakes This nation of rolling plains and dense forests is **landlocked**. In other words, it is surrounded entirely by land. Long ago, glaciers scraped across its plains. The ice sheets created the 11,000 lakes that dot the Belarus landscape.

In the past, the country’s economy was based on farming and logging. Both are still important today. But about a fifth of its farmland and forestland can no longer be used. This land was poisoned when the nearby Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded in 1986. Much of this large area will never be safe for farming or logging again.

Belarus Looks East to Russia Almost 8 out of 10 people in Belarus are Belarusians. Russians make up about 11 percent of the population. During Soviet rule, Russian workers and government officials did much to develop Belarus. They cleared and drained its land to create farms run by the government. They brought manufacturing and industry to its cities. They shaped its political system and influenced its culture.

Today, Belarus still has close ties to Russia. Most of its foreign trade is with Russia. Belarus depends on gas and oil from Russia to run its industries. The two countries have signed agreements to work together closely in the future.

However, relations between Belarus and Russia are not always smooth. The two countries disagree about labor and trade issues. They have different ideas about how much power the government should have over its citizens and industries. Although the economy of Belarus is growing, there are many challenges ahead.

A Belarus Tractor Factory

Making farm machines is a large industry in Belarus. These tractors were built in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.





Rewards for Voting

This woman is buying groceries using coupons that she received for voting. Supermarket chains in Lithuania gave these coupons to citizens who voted in a 2003 election. In that election, Lithuanians voted to join the EU.

18.6 Lithuania: One of Three Baltic States

Three former parts of the Soviet Union—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—are known as the Baltic States. They line the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Lithuania can look either east or west for political ties. More and more, it looks west.

An Economy Based on Soil and the Sea The fertile soil of Lithuania produces good crops. Farmers grow potatoes, sugar beets, and flax for cloth. Fields of grain cross the central plains. There are dairies everywhere. Cattle, sheep, pigs, and poultry provide meat, eggs, and milk. The Baltic Sea provides food, too, with its fishing grounds and fish farms.

Lithuania has limited mineral resources. Limestone, gravel, sand, and clay are mined to make cement, glass, and ceramics. But fossil fuels and metals are in short supply.

Lithuania Looks West to Europe Nationalism is a strong force in Lithuania. Lithuanians united as a nation around 1200. Their nation was the first part of the Soviet Union to declare its independence in 1990.

Since then, Lithuanians have reformed their political system. Today the nation has a democratic government. Its leaders are chosen in free and fair elections.

In 2004, Lithuania became a member of the **European Union**, or EU. Chapter 14 explores the EU in detail. Lithuania receives money from the EU to develop its economy.

Lithuania has also joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. Members of NATO promise to defend each other if attacked by another country. By joining NATO and the EU, Lithuanians hope to create a future of peace and prosperity.





18.7 Russia: The Largest Nation on Earth

Imagine watching from space as your country breaks apart and then ceases to exist. That's what Soviet astronaut Sergei Krikalev did in 1991. He flew up to the Mir space station as a citizen of the Soviet Union. While he circled the Earth 16 times a day, the Soviet Union collapsed. When he finally set foot on land, he was still a citizen of the largest nation on Earth. But that nation was now Russia.

Rich Resources in a Vast Land Although Russia is not as large as the Soviet Union was, it's still huge. It has vast forests and large deposits of coal and minerals. Its most important resources are oil and natural gas. Because of its cold **climate**, however, less than 8 percent of its land is suitable for farming.

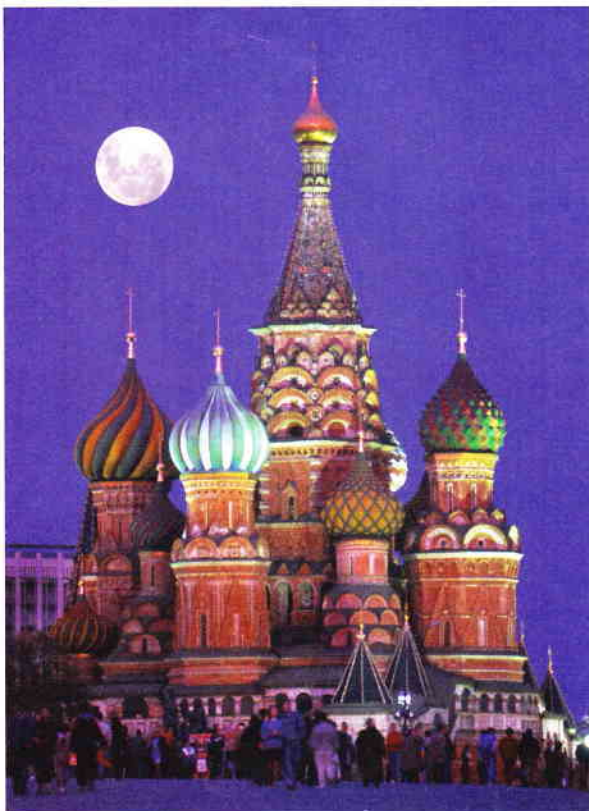
During Soviet rule, the government owned and ran this vast country's farms, factories, and businesses. With the end of Soviet rule, the government sold its factories and businesses. But these sales did not help the Russian people. Powerful political leaders grabbed the best businesses for themselves.

Today, most Russian businesses are privately run. But they are not always well run. Many factories sold by the government were old and in need of repair. But often the new owners had no money to make the needed repairs. Other businesses made goods of such poor quality that no one wanted to buy them. As a result, many businesses failed.

Still, with all its challenges, Russia's economy has been growing every year. Oil exports are a big reason for this growth.

St. Basil's Cathedral

Ivan the Terrible, the first czar of all Russia, built St. Basil's Cathedral. Legend says that when the church was finished, Ivan ordered its architect to be blinded. This, the czar hoped, would prevent him from ever creating anything so beautiful again. However, the architect did go on to design another cathedral.



The Challenges Facing Russians Today Life is not easy in Russia. The crime rate is high. Housing is very costly, and many people have to live with relatives. Alcohol abuse and pollution are also big concerns.

Ethnic nationalism has caused problems as well. Russia's 150 million people come from dozens of ethnic groups. Not all of these groups are pleased to still be a part of Russia. In addition, most Russians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. However, Russia also has Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other Christian groups. The activities of some religious groups are limited by law. For example, some are prevented from printing religious literature or operating religious schools.

In an area known as Chechnya, opposition to Russian rule has led to rebellion. During the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, a group of Chechen leaders declared their independence from Russia. In 1994, Russian tanks rolled into Chechnya to crush the independence movement. More than 100,000 Chechens died in the war that followed. A cease-fire brought an official peace to Chechnya in 1996, but the conflict continues. Battles, bombings, and terrorist attacks have killed thousands on both sides.



18.8 Beginning to Think Globally

In this chapter, you have learned about five factors that affect whether a new nation-state will succeed or fail. These factors are security, political freedom, economic growth, quality of life, and national unity. You have seen the power of nationalism to unite a country. You have also seen how conflict among ethnic groups can tear a country apart.

Each of the 15 nation-states that arose from the former Soviet Union has its own story. Only time will tell whether they will succeed. The same could have been said about the United States in its first years. It won its war of independence only with outside help. Its people felt more loyal to their states than to a new country called the United States. Its economy was weak. And its first government could not seem to hold the new nation together.

The world is always changing. Empires rise and collapse. New nations are born and die. Think about this as you look at the map showing the rise of new nations in the next section. Which nations will succeed? And which are likely to fail?

Air Pollution in Russia

During Soviet rule, new factories were built across Russia. But little attention was paid to pollution. In 84 of Russia's largest cities, air pollution is still 10 times the level that is considered safe.

18.9 Global Connections

The map shows new nations that have arisen since 1945. The table gives data about three of those nations. Think about what the information in the table might reveal about each nation's chance of success.

What were these new nations before they gained their independence? Most of the new nations formed since 1945 were once colonies. This is especially true of new nations in Africa and Asia. Namibia, for example, was once a German colony in Africa. Other new nations were parts of dying empires or failed states. Croatia, for instance, was once part of the failed state of Yugoslavia. Still others were parts of nations that still exist. East Timor was part of Indonesia from 1976 until 1999.

How did these new nations gain their independence? Most new nations are born out of a violent struggle. Namibia, Croatia, and East Timor all had to fight for their independence. Some new nations, however, have a peaceful start. This was true of the 15 new nation-states that arose out of the Soviet Union.

Which of these new nations are most likely to succeed?

The answer, as you have learned, depends on many factors. Namibia, for example, is rich in mineral resources like diamonds and uranium. Most of Namibia's people are black. However, they are divided into many ethnic groups. East Timor and Croatia are not so divided. But both are struggling to rebuild economies damaged by years of war.

Nations Gaining Independence, 1945–2005



Information About Three New Nations

Nation	Life Expectancy (years)	GDP per Capita	Population Below Poverty Line
Namibia	41	\$7,200	50%
Croatia	74	\$10,600	under 10%
East Timor	66	\$500	42%



	Infant Mortality (deaths per 1,000 births)	Ethnic Diversity	Freedom Index Ranking*	Year of Independence
	70	black 88%, white 6%, mixed 6%	political rights, 2 civil liberties, 3	1990
	7	Croatian 90%, Serb 4%, other 6%	political rights, 2 civil liberties, 2	1992
	49	Austronesian, Papuan, small Chinese minority	political rights, 3 civil liberties, 3	2002

*On this scale, 1 represents the highest degree of freedom, and 7 the lowest.