



RELIGION, POLITICS, AND IDEAS OF Vladimir Putin

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Summary

Putin began as an atheist, but a car accident and a house fire caused him to question his views and now he is a devout member of the Russian Orthodox Church. Some argue he is ushering in a new theocratic government in Russia.

Putin's decades-long political career in Russia has endured the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition of Russia into free market enterprise and democracy. He has many critics and at times seems antagonistic toward the West.

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Editorial

Vladimir Putin was born and raised in Leningrad, U.S.S.R., now known as St. Petersburg, Russia.

Putin had, in classic Soviet fashion, a secular upbringing. His father was a "model Communist" and a "militant atheist," though his mother was a devout Eastern Orthodox Christian^[1] and she had young Putin secretly baptized into that church.^[2]

It was merely symbolic, however, as Putin went through the bulk of his adult life—rising through the ranks of the KGB and the Soviet Communist Party—conforming to Soviet secular convention.

It wasn't until the double-whammy of 1) his wife's car accident in 1993 and 2) a life-threatening house fire in 1996 that Putin began questioning his atheism. During a vulnerable moment before Putin departed for a diplomatic trip to Israel, his mother gave him a baptismal cross. He said of the occasion:

I did as she said and then put the cross around my neck. I have never taken it off since.^[3]

Now, Putin has become a bit of a zealot. He seems to want to reestablish a pre-Soviet combination of church and state, saying:

First and foremost we should be governed by common sense. But common sense should be based on moral principles first. And it is not possible today to have morality separated from religious values.^[4]

Furthermore, Putin has proposed compulsory religion and ethics classes for Russian students.^[5]

There are many reports of collusion between the Russian Orthodox clergy and the Russian government, with each of them fighting the other's battles for them. The most recent example to receive worldwide attention was the Pussy Riot debacle, in which the girl-punk band sang at a church in Moscow: "Mother of God, Blessed Virgin, drive out Putin."^[6] Both the church and the government were outraged and the band was sentenced to two years of prison labor.^[7]

The western world erupted in outrage and, recalling Soviet oppression of artists and intellectuals, condemned the sentence as theocratic totalitarianism. Even the Obama administration weighed in, saying:

While we understand the group's behavior was offensive for some, we have concerns about the way these young women were treated by the Russian judicial system.^[8]

Still, Putin's religiosity is a blessing to some in the international community. The Eastern Orthodox Church has asked him to protect Christians worldwide, and he has agreed. Russia's controversial support of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria is due to Putin's concern that the Christian minority in that country will be persecuted if Assad is toppled.^[9]

Much remains to be seen, as Putin discovers his newfound devotion to God and Russia still grapples with its religious freedom.

Not a Czar, but close.

Putin has been (so far) three times the Russian President and twice the Russian Prime Minister. It's a repetitive grab for power that has many in the West speculating that, not only is Putin becoming something like the old Russian Czars,^[10] but that Russia itself is reverting back to its totalitarian ways.^[11]

It all began when Putin, after graduating from Leningrad State University, became an intelligence officer for the KGB. He spent most of his KGB career in East Germany and, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, he retired.^[12] So, we could safely say that Putin was an enthusiastic communist—

even though his education was in free market economics.^[13] And, it could be argued, that business and enterprise has been greatly encouraged under his leadership.^[14]

Putin wishes to lead Russia out of its old ways and integrate it into the West—for the most part—though he exudes that nationalistic Russian pride:

We are a major European nation, we have always been an integral part of Europe and share all its values and the ideals of freedom and democracy. But we will carry out this process ourselves, taking into account all our specific characteristics, and do not intend to report to anyone on the progress we make.^[15]

But Russia is still in transition, and at times, Putin is at odds with the West, particularly in foreign policy. He has positioned Russia en face de the U.S. and the E.U. in terms of North Korea^[16] and Syria.^[17]

And he struggles with organized crime in his country,^[18] though many suspect corruption is involved, up to the highest levels of Russian politics.^[19]

These are but a few of the issues and a small slice of the ideology surrounding Vladimir Putin. His nearly 40 year career in Russian politics covers a lot of ground. Check out his [Wikipedia](#) page for the beginnings of a comprehensive coverage of Putins's politics.

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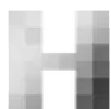
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