



# Absolute Rulers of Russia

## MAIN IDEA

**POWER AND AUTHORITY** Peter the Great made many changes in Russia to try to make it more like western Europe.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Many Russians today debate whether to model themselves on the West or to focus on traditional Russian culture.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Ivan the Terrible
- Peter the Great
- boyar
- westernization

**SETTING THE STAGE** Ivan III of Moscow, who ruled Russia from 1462 to 1505, accomplished several things. First, he conquered much of the territory around Moscow. Second, he liberated Russia from the Mongols. Third, he began to centralize the Russian government. Ivan III was succeeded by his son, Vasily, who ruled for 28 years. Vasily continued his father’s work of adding territory to the growing Russian state. He also increased the power of the central government. This trend continued under his son, Ivan IV, who would become an absolute ruler.

## TAKING NOTES

**Summarizing** Use a cluster diagram to list the important events of Peter the Great’s reign.



## The First Czar

Ivan IV, called **Ivan the Terrible**, came to the throne in 1533 when he was only three years old. His young life was disrupted by struggles for power among Russia’s landowning nobles, known as **boyars**. The boyars fought to control young Ivan. When he was 16, Ivan seized power and had himself crowned czar. This title meant “caesar,” and Ivan was the first Russian ruler to use it officially. He also married the beautiful Anastasia, related to an old boyar family, the Romanovs.

The years from 1547 to 1560 are often called Ivan’s “good period.” He won great victories, added lands to Russia, gave Russia a code of laws, and ruled justly.

**Rule by Terror** Ivan’s “bad period” began in 1560 after Anastasia died. Accusing the boyars of poisoning his wife, Ivan turned against them. He organized his own police force, whose chief duty was to hunt down and murder people Ivan considered traitors. The members of this police force dressed in black and rode black horses.

Using these secret police, Ivan executed many boyars, their families, and the peasants who worked their lands. Thousands of people died. Ivan seized the boyars’ estates and gave them to a new class of nobles, who had to remain loyal to him or lose their land.

Eventually, Ivan committed an act that was both a personal tragedy and a national disaster. In 1581, during a violent quarrel, he killed his oldest son and heir. When Ivan died three years later, only his weak second son was left to rule.

**Rise of the Romanovs** Ivan’s son proved to be physically and mentally incapable of ruling. After he died without an heir, Russia experienced a period of

**MAIN IDEA****Recognizing Effects**

**A** What were the long-term effects of Ivan's murder of his oldest son?

turmoil known as the Time of Troubles. Boyars struggled for power, and heirs of czars died under mysterious conditions. Several impostors tried to claim the throne.

Finally, in 1613, representatives from many Russian cities met to choose the next czar. Their choice was Michael Romanov, grandnephew of Ivan the Terrible's wife, Anastasia. Thus began the Romanov dynasty, which ruled Russia for 300 years (1613–1917). **A**

## Peter the Great Comes to Power

Over time, the Romanovs restored order to Russia. They strengthened government by passing a law code and putting down a revolt. This paved the way for the absolute rule of Czar Peter I. At first, Peter shared the throne with his half-brother. However, in 1696, Peter became sole ruler of Russia. He is known to history as **Peter the Great**, because he was one of Russia's greatest reformers. He also continued the trend of increasing the czar's power.

**Russia Contrasts with Europe** When Peter I came to power, Russia was still a land of boyars and serfs. Serfdom in Russia lasted into the mid-1800s, much longer than it did in western Europe. Russian landowners wanted serfs to stay on the land and produce large harvests. The landowners treated the serfs like property. When a Russian landowner sold a piece of land, he sold the serfs with it. Landowners could give away serfs as presents or to pay debts. It was also against the law for serfs to run away from their owners.

Most boyars knew little of western Europe. In the Middle Ages, Russia had looked to Constantinople, not to Rome, for leadership. Then Mongol rule had cut Russia off from the Renaissance and the Age of Exploration. Geographic barriers also isolated Russia. Its only seaport, Archangel in northern Russia, was choked with ice much of the year. The few travelers who reached Moscow were usually Dutch or German, and they had to stay in a separate part of the city.

Religious differences widened the gap between western Europe and Russia. The Russians had adopted the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity. Western Europeans were mostly Catholics or Protestants, and the Russians viewed them as heretics and avoided them. **B**

**Peter Visits the West** In the 1680s, people in the German quarter of Moscow were accustomed to seeing the young Peter striding through their neighborhood on his long legs. (Peter was more than six and a half feet tall.) He was fascinated by the modern tools and machines in the foreigners' shops. Above all, he had a passion for ships and the sea. The young czar believed that Russia's future depended on having a warm-water port. Only then could Russia compete with the more modern states of western Europe.

Peter was 24 years old when he became the sole ruler of Russia. In 1697, just one year later, he embarked on the "Grand Embassy," a long visit to western Europe. One of Peter's goals was to learn about European customs and manufacturing techniques. Never before had a czar traveled among Western "heretics."

**MAIN IDEA****Summarizing**

**B** Why was Russia culturally different from western Europe?

### History Makers



**Peter the Great**  
1672–1725

Peter the Great had the mind of a genius, the body of a giant, and the ferocious temper of a bear. He was so strong that he was known to take a heavy silver plate and roll it up as if it were a piece of paper. If someone annoyed him, he would knock the offender unconscious.

The painting above represents Peter as he looked when he traveled through western Europe. He dressed in the plain clothes of an ordinary worker to keep his identity a secret.

#### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on Peter the Great, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)

## Peter Rules Absolutely

Inspired by his trip to the West, Peter resolved that Russia would compete with Europe on both military and commercial terms. Peter's goal of **westernization**, of using western Europe as a model for change, was not an end in itself. Peter saw it as a way to make Russia stronger.

**Peter's Reforms** Although Peter believed Russia needed to change, he knew that many of his people disagreed. As he said to one official, "For you know yourself that, though a thing be good and necessary, our people will not do it unless forced to." To force change upon his state, Peter increased his powers as an absolute ruler. 🗣️

Peter brought the Russian Orthodox Church under state control. He abolished the office of patriarch, head of the Church. He set up a group called the Holy Synod to run the Church under his direction.

Like Ivan the Terrible, Peter reduced the power of the great landowners. He recruited men from lower-ranking families. He then promoted them to positions of authority and rewarded them with grants of land.

To modernize his army, Peter hired European officers, who drilled his soldiers in European tactics with European weapons. Being a soldier became a lifetime job. By the time of Peter's death, the Russian army numbered 200,000 men. To pay for this huge army, Peter imposed heavy taxes.

**Westernizing Russia** As part of his attempts to westernize Russia, Peter undertook the following:

- introduced potatoes, which became a staple of the Russian diet
- started Russia's first newspaper and edited its first issue himself
- raised women's status by having them attend social gatherings
- ordered the nobles to give up their traditional clothes for Western fashions
- advanced education by opening a school of navigation and introducing schools for the arts and sciences

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Bias

🗣️ Judging from this remark, what was Peter's view of his people?



## Global Patterns

### East Meets West

In the East, Western influence would affect not only Russia. Other eastern nations would give way—not always willingly—to the West and Western culture. In 1854, Japan was forced to open its doors to the United States. By 1867, however, Japan had decided to embrace Western civilization. The Japanese modernized their military based on the German and British models. They also adopted the American system of public education. China and Korea, on the other hand, would resist foreign intervention well into the 1900s.

Peter believed that education was a key to Russia's progress. In former times, subjects were forbidden under pain of death to study the sciences in foreign lands. Now subjects were not only permitted to leave the country, many were forced to do it.

**Establishing St. Petersburg** To promote education and growth, Peter wanted a seaport that would make it easier to travel to the West. Therefore, Peter fought Sweden to gain a piece of the Baltic coast. After 21 long years of war, Russia finally won the “window on Europe” that Peter had so desperately wanted.

Actually, Peter had secured that window many years before Sweden officially surrendered it. In 1703, he began building a new city on Swedish lands occupied by Russian troops. Although the swampy site was unhealthful, it seemed ideal to Peter. Ships could sail down the Neva River into the Baltic Sea and on to western Europe. Peter called the city St. Petersburg, after his patron saint.

To build a city on a desolate swamp was no easy matter. Every summer, the army forced thousands of luckless serfs to leave home and work in St. Petersburg. An estimated 25,000 to 100,000 people died from the terrible working conditions and widespread diseases. When St. Petersburg was finished, Peter ordered many Russian nobles to leave the comforts of Moscow and settle in his new capital. In time, St. Petersburg became a busy port. **D**

For better or for worse, Peter the Great had tried to westernize and reform the culture and government of Russia. To an amazing extent he had succeeded. By the time of his death in 1725, Russia was a power to be reckoned with in Europe. Meanwhile, another great European power, England, had been developing a form of government that limited the power of absolute monarchs, as you will see in Section 5.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Synthesizing

**D** Which of Peter's actions in building St. Petersburg show his power as an absolute monarch?

#### SECTION

## 4

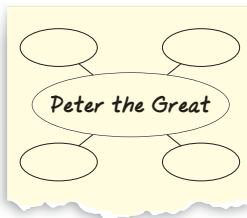
#### ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Ivan the Terrible
- boyar
- Peter the Great
- westernization

#### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which event had the most impact on modern Russia? Why?



#### MAIN IDEAS

3. How did Ivan the Terrible deal with his enemies during his “bad period”?
4. Why did Peter the Great believe that Russia's future depended on having a warm-water port?
5. What were some of the ways Peter tried to westernize Russia?

#### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Who do you think was more of an absolute monarch: Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great?
7. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Which class of Russian society probably didn't benefit from Peter's reforms? Why?
8. **HYPOTHESIZING** How might Peter's attempts at westernization have affected his people's opinion of Christians in western Europe?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** Write a one-paragraph **expository essay** explaining which of Peter the Great's actions reveal that he saw himself as the highest authority in Russia.

#### CONNECT TO TODAY STAGING A DEBATE

Peter the Great's reforms were a first step toward Russia's westernization. Today the country continues the process by experimenting with democratization. Research to find out how Russia has fared as a democracy. Then stage a **debate** to argue whether the experiment is working.