

GRAPHIC

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its impact on former republics

By Caroline Souza, Larissa Redivo, Lucas Gomes and Nicholas Pretto - on December 17, 2021

On December 26, 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was dissolved. After seven decades of existence, the communist country has spread to 15 nations

In 1917, a revolution in the then Russian Empire led to the formation of the first communist nation in history. Other countries adopted the socioeconomic model and, in 1922, a treaty made the union of four republics official. Thus, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or USSR was born.

Image with the flags of the USSR and the four former republics (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Transcaucasian Republic) that joined together to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The country expanded and became one of the leading powers in the world. The counterpoint between the communist nation and the US-led capitalist bloc marked international relations in the second half of the 20th century.

Map with the following description “Map of the Soviet Union and most populous cities in 1989”

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union was already showing signs of instability and was establishing policies of openness, such as *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

In 1990, Lithuania declared its independence, becoming the first Soviet republic to secede. By the end of the following year, the USSR would no longer exist.

Chart with the following description “Number of countries in the Soviet Union - from 1922 to 1991, considering current countries”

Image with the following description “Name and flag of former Soviet republics - by date of the declaration of independence”. On the left the flags and the names are listed as they were in the Soviet Union and on the right they are listed as currently.

The socioeconomic crisis resulting from the collapse impacted the HDI, GDP per capita and population growth in countries. Over time, each of the new countries developed differently.

Indicators of the former Soviet republics, by group

Central Asia

The region was divided in different ways, but at the end of the 1920s it already had a division similar to the current one. After the dissolution, the new countries maintained their population growth and Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, with abundant fossil resources, enriched.

There is an image titled “Location of central Asian countries” followed by three charts: 1) HDI - from 1990 to 2019; 2) GDP per capita - in 2011 dollars, from 1990 to 2018; 3) Population growth - % compared to the previous year, from 1990 to 2018.

Caucasus

The three current countries formed the Transcaucasian Republic, a founding member of the Soviet Union, and suffered heavy economic losses after the collapse. Azerbaijan stands out from the rest from the 21st century onwards, in part due to the country's large oil reserves.

There is an image titled “Location of the Caucasus countries” followed by three charts: 1) HDI - from 1990 to 2019; 2) GDP per capita - in 2011 dollars, from 1990 to 2018; 3) Population growth - % compared to the previous year, from 1990 to 2018.

Eastern Europe

All countries in the region have suffered from population decline since the collapse of the USSR. The area has greater political instability and, since 2014, Ukraine and Russia have been under military conflict.

There is an image titled “Location of the Eastern Europe countries” followed by three charts: 1) HDI - from 1990 to 2019; 2) GDP per capita - in 2011 dollars, from 1990 to 2018; 3) Population growth - % compared to the previous year, from 1990 to 2018.

Baltic countries

The countries became independent from the Russian Empire after World War I, but were annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II. In 2004, they joined the European Union.

There is an image titled “Location of the Baltic countries countries” followed by three charts: 1) HDI - from 1990 to 2019; 2) GDP per capita - in 2011 dollars, from 1990 to 2018; 3) Population growth - % compared to the previous year, from 1990 to 2018 (there is a highlight in this last graph with the following sentence "Population decline is marked in the three nations").

Russia

Cradle of the 1917 revolution, it is the main former republic. He inherited the nuclear arsenal and the permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The country is going through a demographic crisis and has been led by Putin since 1999.

There is an image titled “Featured cities” followed by three charts: 1) HDI - from 1990 to 2019; 2) GDP per capita - in 2011 dollars, from 1990 to 2018; 3) Population growth - % compared to the previous year, from 1990 to 2018.

Click to expand the chart

Notes: Crimea is officially part of Ukraine, but it was annexed by Russia. On the maps of the two countries, it is represented with a lighter red color.

Source: Data on HDI and population growth are from the UN (United Nations). Historical GDP per capita data are from the Maddington Project Database 2020

(<https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/releases/maddison-project-database-2020>). Natural Earth Cartographic Base. Information from the 1989 Soviet Census is from S. Kono's article, Recent trends of the population in the Soviet Union (1990) (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12316754/>).

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