Political Science 369
The Politics of Post-Soviet Russia

Northwestern University
Department of Political Science
Spring 2021
Tues. & Thurs. 9:30AM-10:50AM

Course meets synchronously on Zoom at: https://northwestern.zoom.us/j/94023773372

Instructor: Jordan Gans-Morse
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COURSE SUMMARY

From civil war to nuclear weapons, mafia thugs to oligarchs, and natural resource battles to modern-day dictators, Russia has experienced a remarkable range of political phenomena over the past two decades. This course analyzes the political, economic, and foreign policy revolutions that shook Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Through the lens of the Russian experience, we will examine key concepts in comparative politics, such as revolution, regime change, market formation, nationalism, and state building.

Whether you plan to professionally engage in politics, conduct international business, or simply be a well-educated global citizen, you need to know about Russia. It is the world’s largest country by geographic size and the ninth\(^1\) largest country by population. It remains one of the world’s only two nuclear superpowers. It is the world’s largest oil producer and exporter. And it widely is considered – along with China, India, and Brazil – to be one of the world’s most important emerging economies.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to each lecture and to attend all lectures and discussion sections. If a student has a legitimate reason to miss a session (e.g., a religious holiday), please discuss this with the professor and TA at the beginning of the term.

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\(^1\) This is according to the CIA World Factbook. Some sources place Russia as the eighth largest country by population.
Neither the readings nor the lecture slides will provide comprehensive coverage of the materials you are expected to know for the papers and exam.

There will be three assignments: a midterm exam, a 5- to 7-page paper, and a final exam. The paper assignment and exams will be based on the lectures and required readings. Evaluation in the course will be decided as follows:

Midterm: 25%
Paper: 25%
Final: 30%
Attendance and Participation: 20%

The midterm will be held on Thursday, April 29. The paper will be due on Friday, May 28 at noon. The final exam will be held on Thursday, June 10.

Late assignments will be penalized a half grade per day (e.g., an A- becomes a B+), with the exception of documented cases of illness or family crisis. In such cases, a request must be made to the professor and TA prior to the assignment’s due date. The failure to turn in a paper or to attend an exam session will result in an F for the given assignment. Papers previously or simultaneously submitted for another course will not be accepted.

**RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT**

Students enrolled in this course are required to complete a research assignment that can include up to four hours of research study participation. These studies require that students set up an appointment to complete participation at a laboratory on campus (or via an on-line survey). Students will learn how studies are conducted and will receive a synopsis at the conclusion of the quarter describing the study’s goal, result, and relevance to the class. Students who prefer not to participate in research as a subject may opt for an alternative that entails reading any one chapter about political science research and writing a 5-page reaction paper. The typical chapter is about 20 pages and thus reading it and writing a 5-page paper should take approximately four hours.

During the first week of the quarter, students will receive an e-mail asking them whether they prefer study participation or the alternative assignment. The e-mail will also include details on how to complete either requirement. Failure to complete the requirement during the quarter will result in an incomplete. Failure to complete the requirement during the following quarter will result in a failing grade for the class. *Note that if you are enrolled in multiple classes that require participation, you only need to satisfy the requirement one time. Also, if you already completed the requirement in another course in a previous quarter, you are excused from the requirement.*

**ZOOM POLICY**

To the extent possible, I would prefer all students to keep their video on during the lectures, but I recognize that for technical or other reasons, this may not always be feasible. At minimum, please turn your video on when asking questions unless your circumstances prevent this.
**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Instructors are required by university policy to report violations of academic integrity standards to the Dean’s Office. A non-exhaustive list of behaviors that violate standards of academic integrity includes: cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining an unfair advantage, aiding and abetting dishonesty, falsification of records and official documents, and unauthorized access to computerized academic or administrative records or systems. Note that even unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism. If you are unsure about whether to cite or how to cite a source, then confer with the professor or teaching assistant. Information about Northwestern’s academic integrity policies can be found at http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/.

You are strongly encouraged to take issues of academic integrity seriously. Nearly 20 Northwestern students were suspended last year due to violations of academic integrity standards. Such violations can end up on your academic record and may become a red flag for employers and graduate schools.

**ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

All necessary accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Please contact the professor at the beginning of the term so that we can work together with AccessibleNU to make arrangements.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the course, the aim is that you will have improved your ability to:

- Apply critical thinking and analytical writing skills to the study of contemporary political and economic events;
- Discuss intelligently the political and economic developments in Russia and surrounding post-communist countries;
- Use theories of comparative politics and political economy to develop explanations of variation across political systems.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

The following book is required:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)

We will be reading several chapters from the following but purchase is optional. Scans of the assigned readings will be posted on Canvas:


Other readings on the syllabus also will be made available through Canvas.
PART I: The Soviet Era

Thursday, April 1
Lecture 1: Introduction

Readings:

  - Introduction (pp. 1-11) (Canvas)

Tuesday, April 6
Lecture 2: Overview of the Soviet System – Part 1

Key themes:

- The Russian Revolution
- Building socialism
- Stalinism

Readings:

  - Excerpts from Chp 1: The Idea of Communism (pp. 9-11, 18-25) (Canvas)
  - Chp 4: Building Socialism: Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917-1940 (pp. 56-77) (Canvas)
  - Chp 4: Terror (pp. 50-62) (Canvas)

Further Background Materials:


Thursday, April 8
Lecture 3: Overview of the Soviet System – Part 2

Key themes:

- The USSR after Stalin
- Totalitarianism: A new political order
- The Soviet command economy

Readings:
  - Chp 13: Khrushchev and the Twentieth Party Congress (pp. 227-244) (Canvas)
  - Chp 1: What Communism Actually Was (pp. 20-38) (Canvas)

Further Background Materials:


**Tuesday, April 13**

*Lecture 4: Collapse of the Soviet System – Part 1*

Key themes:

- Structural pressures: Economics, demographics, and foreign policy
- Gorbachev’s economic and political reforms
- Societal mobilization: Nationalism, social movements, and civil society
- Eastern European democratization and fall of the Iron Curtain
- The August 1991 coup and the Soviet Empire’s last days

Readings:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  - Chp 1: The Captain (pp. 1-40)
  - Part I, Chp 3: Statements and Explanations by the Putschists (pp. 55-68) (Canvas)
  - Part II, Chps 1 and 4: The Public Reacts (pp. 71-77, 100-110) (Canvas)

Further Background Materials:

Thursday, April 15
Lecture 5: Collapse of the Soviet System – Part 2

Key Themes:

- Structural explanations
- Contingent explanations
- Institutional explanations

Readings:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  - Chp 5: The Unraveling (pp. 163-196)

Further Background Materials:

- Michael McFaul, *Russia’s Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Cornell University Press, 2001)

PART II: The Yeltsin Years

Tuesday, April 20
Lecture 6: Politics, Part 1 – The Attempt to Build Democracy

Key themes:

- Building institutions for democracy
- The October 1993 constitutional crisis: A second attempt at democracy
- The 1996 presidential elections: Putting communism in the rearview mirror

Readings:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  - Excerpts from Chp 2: The Natural (pp. 41-70)

Further Background Materials:
• Michael McFaul, *Russia’s Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Cornell University Press, 2001)

**Thursday, April 22**  
*Lecture 7: Politics, Part 2 – The Attempt to Build a Nation-State*

**Key themes:**

• Nationalism and pseudo-federalism in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia  
• Ethnic sovereignty and the fragmentation of the Russian state  
• The wars in Chechnya

**Readings:**

• Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)  
  o Excerpts from Chp 8: The Mountains (pp. 262-298)  
• Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (Yale University Press, 1999)  
  o Chp 1: A Personal Memoir of Grozny and the Chechen War (pp. 17-55) (Canvas)

**Further Background Materials:**


**Tuesday, April 27**  
*Lecture 8: Economics – The Attempt to Build a Market Economy*

**Key themes:**

• The politics of economic reform  
• The Soviet legacy and economic crisis  
• “Wild East” Capitalism: Oligarchs, mafia, and barter

**Readings:**
Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  - Excerpts from Chp 6: The Transformation (pp. 197-232)

  - Choose one of the following:
    - Chp 5: Mikhail Khodorkovsky (pp. 100-126) (Canvas)
    - Chp 6: Boris Berezovsky (pp. 127-149) (Canvas)

Further Background Materials:

- Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, *Without a Map: Political Tactics and Economic Reform in Russia* (The MIT Press, 2001)

**Thursday, April 29: MIDTERM**

**Tuesday, May 4**

*Lecture 9: Foreign Policy – The Attempt to Join the West*

Key themes:

- Russia’s “near abroad”: Civil wars and nuclear weapons during the Soviet collapse
- The search for a new identity: Westernizers, Eurasianists, and Statists
- NATO expansion and the Kosovo bombings

Readings:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  - Chp 9: Falling Apart (pp. 310-339)
  - Excerpts from Chp 1: The Hedgehog and the Bear (pp. 3-10) (Canvas)
  - Chp 13: The Jaws of Victory (pp. 332-349) (Canvas)
Further Background Materials:

- Sergei Stankevich, “Russia in Search of Itself,” *The National Interest* (Summer 1992)

**PART III: The Rise of Putin**

**Thursday, May 6**  
*Lecture 10: Politics, Part 1 – The Collapse of Democracy, the Resurgence of the State*

Key themes:

- Putin’s rise and the recentralization of power
- Conflict in the Caucusus and domestic terrorism
- Changing political institutions: Elections, legislatures, and federalism

Readings:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)  
  - Excerpts from Chp 3: Unreasonable Doubt (pp. 80-108)
  - Excerpts from Chp 4: The Mountains (pp. 298-309)

Further Background Materials:

- M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

**Tuesday, May 11**  
*Lecture 11: Politics, Part 2 – Ruling Russia in the 2000s*

Key themes:

- United Russia and the formation of a single-party system
• The resurgence of the KGB successors
• Medvedev and the creation of “tandemocracy”

Readings:
• Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  o Excerpts from Chp 4: The Understudy (pp. 134-159)
  o Excerpts from Chp 9: The System (pp. 210-224, 231-240) (Canvas)

Further Background Materials:
• Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President* (Public Affairs, 2000)
• Daniel Treisman, “Putin’s Silovarchs,” *Orbis* 5, 1 (2008)

Thursday, May 13
*Lecture 12: Economics – Oil, Growth, and State Capitalism*

Key themes:
• Economic revival and the petro-state
• The rise of state corporations
• Civilizing capitalism: Taming oligarchs, building law and order

Readings:
• Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
  o Excerpts from Chp 6: The Transformation (pp. 232-239)

Further Background Materials:
• Jordan Gans-Morse, *Property Rights in Post-Soviet Russia: Violence, Corruption, and...*
Demand for Law (Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Tuesday, May 18
Lecture 13: Foreign Policy – Seeking Great Power Status

Key themes:
• 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the global war on terrorism
• Oil politics
• The “color” revolutions
• The US-Russian “Reset”
• Conflicts with Georgia and Ukraine

Readings:
• John Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” Foreign Affairs (September-October 2014)

Further Background Materials:
• Robert Legvold, Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past (Columbia University Press, 2007)
• Andrei Tsygankov, Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity, 3rd Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013)

PART IV: The Consolidation of Putinism

Thursday, May 20
Lecture 14: Politics & Economics – The New “Putinism”

Key themes:
• Putin’s return to the presidency
• Protests and the rise of an anti-corruption movement
• Domestic implications of Russia’s geopolitical resurgence
• Who will succeed Putin?
Readings:

- Chris Miller, “The Surprising Success of Putinomics,” *Foreign Affairs* (February 7, 2018) and “Can Putin Fix Russia’s Sputtering Economy,” *Foreign Affairs* (March 13, 2019)

Further Background Materials:

- Samuel Greene and Graeme Robertson, *Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia* (Yale University Press, 2019)

**Tuesday, May 25**  
Lecture 15: Foreign Policy – Russia Resurgent?

Key themes:

- Russian interventions on a global scale
- Does Russia have a grand strategy?
- How should the U.S. and Europe respond?

Readings:


Further Background Materials:

PART V: Russia in Context

Thursday, May 27 & Tuesday, June 1
Lectures 16 & 17: Russia, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe

Key themes:

- Roots of democracy and dictatorship
- Diversity of political and economic outcomes in the post-communist world

Readings:

- Daniel Treisman, The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev (Free Press, 2011)
  - Excerpts from Chp 10: The Russia that Has Returned (pp. 340-367)

Further Background Materials:

- Henry Hale, Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

FRIDAY, MAY 28: PAPER DUE BY NOON

THURSDAY, JUNE 10: FINAL EXAM