Political Science 369
The Politics of Post-Soviet Russia

Northwestern University
Department of Political Science
Winter 2018
Mon. & Wed. 9:30-10:50AM, Tech Institute Lecture Room 5

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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.

\(^1\) This is according to the CIA World Factbook. Some sources place Russia as the eighth largest country by population.
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. 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 Wednesday, February 7 during the regular lecture time. The paper will be due on Friday, March 9 at noon. The final exam will be held on Friday, March 23 from 9:00-11:00AM.

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.
IN-CLASS ELECTRONICS POLICY

Please turn all phones off before the lecture. Note that this implies no texting as well as no calls. Laptops may be used for note taking only. Use of email, Facebook, or other activities unrelated to lecture is strictly prohibited and may result in a grade deduction.

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 the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities 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 two books are required:

- Daniel Treisman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev* (Free Press, 2011)
Other readings will be made available through Canvas.

You are strongly encouraged to follow current events in the former Soviet Union by reading The New York Times, The Economist, or the news source of your choice. An excellent source of news on Russia is Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), which can be found online at: http://www.russialist.org/. You can subscribe to the free JRL email newsletter by emailing David Johnson at davidjohnson@starpower.net. Simply state that you are a student and would like to be added to the JRL subscription list.
COURSE OVERVIEW

PART I: Pre-1992

Monday, January 8
Lecture 1: Introduction

Readings:

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

Wednesday, January 10
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:

- Ronald Suny, The Soviet Experiment (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Monday, January 16

NO CLASS (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

Wednesday, January 18
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:

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

Further Background Materials:


Monday, January 22

*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)
  o Chp 1: The Captain (pp. 1-40)
  o Part I, Chp 3: Statements and Explanations by the Putschists (pp. 55-68) (Canvas)
  o Part II, Chps 1 and 4: The Public Reacts (pp. 71-77, 100-110) (Canvas)
Further Background Materials:


**Wednesday, January 24**  
*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: 1992-1999**

**Monday, January 29**  
*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)

**Wednesday, January 31**  
*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)
  - Excerpts from Chp 8: The Mountains (pp. 262-298)
- Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (Yale University Press, 1999)
  - Chp 1: A Personal Memoir of Grozny and the Chechen War (pp. 17-55) (Canvas)

Further Background Materials:

Monday, February 5
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)
  o 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:

- Anders Åslund, How Russia Became a Market Economy (Brookings Institution Press, 1995)
- Clifford Gaddy, The Price of the Past: Russia’s Struggle with the Legacy of a Militarized Economy (Brookings Institution Press, 1998)
- Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, Without a Map: Political Tactics and Economic Reform in Russia (The MIT Press, 2001)
- Yegor Gaidar, Days of Victory and Defeat (University of Washington Press, 1999)

Wednesday, February 7: MIDTERM

Monday, February 12
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)
  o Chp 9: Falling Apart (pp. 310-339)
  o Excerpts from Chp 1: The Hedgehog and the Bear (pp. 3-10) (Canvas)
  o 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: 2000 – present**

**Wednesday, February 14**

*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)
  o Excerpts from Chp 3: Unreasonable Doubt (pp. 80-108)
  o 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)

**Monday, February 19**  
*Lecture 11: Politics, Part 2 – How Russia is Ruled*

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)  
  - Excerpts from Chp 4: The Understudy (pp. 134-159)
  - 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)

**Wednesday, February 21**  
*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)
  - Excerpts from Chp 6: The Transformation (pp. 232-239)

Further Background Materials:


**Monday, February 26**

*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:


**PART IV: RUSSIA IN CONTEXT**

**Wednesday, February 28**  
*Lecture 14: Guest Lecturer – Strobe Talbott (former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State)*

Readings:

- TBD

**Monday, March 5**  
*Lecture 15: Russia’s Future*

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:


Further Background Materials:

- Mark Rice-Oxley, “Moscow 25 Years On: Do I Still Recognise the City?” *The Guardian* (June 9, 2015)

**Wednesday, March 7**  
*Lecture 16: Russia, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe*

Key themes:

- Roots of democracy and dictatorship
• Foundations of market economies
• 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)
  o 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)
• Timothy Frye, Building States and Markets After Communism: The Perils of Polarized Democracy (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

FRIDAY, MARCH 9: PAPER DUE BY NOON

FRIDAY, MARCH 23, 9:00-11:00AM: FINAL EXAM