

PSCI 1172 (cross-lists: REES 1535, PSCI 5172): RUSSIAN POLITICS

(fulfills 'Cross-Cultural Analysis' requirement)

Professor SIL

Department of Political Science

Spring 2023

Course Description and Objectives

Keeping in mind the difficulties of teaching about an adversary that has unleashed a horrifying war, this course will seek to analyze Russian politics as objectively as possible, with an eye to understanding long-term continuities and changes through alternating periods of stability and turmoil. This necessarily entails a consideration of historical complexities, especially the Soviet era (1917-1991). Thus, the first part of the course examines the origins and evolution of the Soviet regime from Lenin to Gorbachev. The goal is not to memorize every historical detail but rather to grasp the sweeping continuities and key shifts in political dynamics, economic development and social conditions, particularly aspects that would later affect post-Soviet Russia. We will also seek to specify which elements stem from the pursuit of a transformative revolutionary vision, which constitute a distinctive model of political organization and economic development, and which reflect long-standing geopolitical ambitions of a former empire (Russia) being temporarily fulfilled through an erstwhile superpower (the USSR).

The rest of the course delves into the evolution of politics, economics, society and foreign policy, first during the early years of transition under Boris Yeltsin (1992-99), and then primarily under Vladimir Putin (2000 - present). In this section, we will begin with a survey of Russia's political system, the fluctuations in economic growth, and changing social conditions over time. In the process, we will consider the rise of the oligarchs, patterns of political protest, social/demographic trends, and the role of natural resources. We will then turn to the drivers of Russia's foreign policy since the break-up of the USSR, trying to identify the sources for the sharp decline in Russia's relations with the US/West since even before the invasion of Ukraine. We will trace some of the key forces that paved the way to the invasion of Ukraine, especially and speculate about what the future holds in terms of peace and conflict in the region.

In all these domains, from Russia's political dynamics and economic policies to its foreign policy behavior, a core question for us is: how "normal" is post-Soviet Russia's trajectory over the last 30 years when compared to other post-communist nations and to non-western powers with their own competing geopolitical aspirations (e.g. China, India, Turkey...). Our answers will vary, but they collectively point to a variety of long-term scenarios worth keeping in mind.

Plan for Delivering Course Content

- **Lectures** will be in person. Facemasks are not required, but please be respectful of the choices of others. Most lectures will be accompanied by slides that will be posted in the relevant Canvas modules after the lecture. The slides will be fairly detailed and will contain key pieces of information, but you should use them as a guide to take your own notes as much as possible. Lectures may extend from 50 minutes to one hour depending on the topic.
- **Recitations** are one hour long, and attendance is mandatory. If you are unable to attend for any unavoidable medical reason or family emergency, you need to inform the TA and me in advance to avoid having the absence marked as “unexcused.” In such situations, you can still get credit for attendance by submitting a 300-350 word “response paper” containing some key points that struck you from two or three of the readings for the week.
- **The T.A. is Daniel Shapiro.** Daniel is a Ph.D. student in the Political Science Department at Penn. He holds an M.A. in Russian Studies from Harvard, and a B.A. from Brown University. He has traveled widely across the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and has extensive knowledge of the region. He will lead the recitations, grade your papers, and hold office hours to answer questions. Please give him your full cooperation and attention.
- **Readings:** There are two required books for the course: one is **Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics, 1917-1991*** (Oxford University Press, 1992), which will be relevant for Part I of the course; the other is brand new text, **Susanne Wengle, ed. *Russian Politics Today*** (Cambridge University Press, 2023), which will be relevant for Part II of the course. You can order these through the University Bookstore. The readings will not duplicate lectures but can offer alternative framings and/or develop particular angles. The Wengle text has a lot of chapters covering a lot of ground; we will only use some of the chapters as required reading, but the others may be of interest to those pursuing a more expansive understanding of Russian politics. In addition to these texts, required readings will include **articles and other supplemental items posted in the modules** for each topic as we move forward through the semester.
- **Requirements:** You will be submitting FOUR PAPERS (take-home exams) in response to prompts in the “Assignment” section on Canvas (where the papers would also be submitted). The first three will be due by 5 pm on February 8, March 1, and April 10 (respectively); each will be worth 20% of the overall grade. The final paper will be due at 5 pm on Friday, MAY 5, and will be worth 30% of the overall grade. The remaining 10% will be at the discretion of the T.A., reflecting attendance and engagement in recitations.
- **Time commitment:** (i) about 3 hours per week to engage the material presented by the Professor and T.A. during scheduled class times; (ii) about 3-5 hours doing readings each week; and (iii) additional hours when required papers are due. This is only a rough estimate, and obviously students will vary in how many hours they invest due to a variety of reasons.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES/TOPICS

(subject to change)

WED, JAN 11 (Introduction)

1. Reading Russia – Wartime Adversary vs. Policy Problem vs. Understanding a Country

<< **MON, JAN 16: no class on Martin Luther King Day** >>

PART I

THE RISE & FALL OF SOVIET RUSSIA, 1917-1991

WED, JAN 18

2. Imperial Russia and the Rise of Marxism

MON, JAN 23

3. Towards the October [1917] Revolution: The Rise of the Bolsheviks

WED, JAN 25

4. Lenin's Ambiguous Legacy, 1918-1924

MON, JAN 30

5. Stalinism (1928-53) as Socialist Development: Collectivization and Central Planning

WED, FEB 1

6. Stalinism (1923-53) as Cultural Revolution: The Great Terror and "New Soviet Man"

MON, FEB 6

7. Wrap-up on Stalinism, with excerpts from movie "STALIN" (HBO Pictures 1992, stars Robert Duvall)

WED, FEB 8 *[FIRST PAPER DUE HERE]*

8. Nikita Khrushchev (1956-64) and the Challenge/Impact of De-Stalinization

MON, FEB 13

9. The Long Brezhnev Era, 1964-82: Stability or Stagnation?

WED, FEB 15

10. Gorbachev's Reforms, Part I: Acceleration, Glasnost, Perestroika

MON, FEB 20 [drop period ends]

11. Gorbachev's Reforms, Part II: Demokratizatsiya and the Fragmentation of Power

WED, FEB 22

12. The End of the USSR: Was It Inevitable?

Part lecture, part review & discussion

MON, FEB 27

13. ** Viewing of movie "MY PERESTROIKA" (excerpts – during class time only)

WED, MAR 1 [SECOND PAPER DUE HERE]

14. After the Break-up: The "Near Abroad," with Special Focus on Ukraine (Pre-2014)

*** NOTE: NO RECITATIONS THIS WEEK (MAR 2-3) ***

*** Week of March 4-12 is SPRING BREAK – enjoy! ***

PART II

POST-SOVIET RUSSIA IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT

MON, MAR 13

15. Troubled Transition, 1992-93: From Polarization to a New Constitution

WED, MAR 15

16. The Executive Branch in Russia: Emergence of a "Super-Presidential" System

MON, MAR 20

17. Parties & Elections: Making Sense of "Sovereign Democracy"

WED, MAR 22

18. Civil Society in Putin's Russia: Constrained -- But There

MON, MAR 27 & WED, MAR 29

19 & 20. Russia's Economy – Before and After 2000: A "Re-Emerging" Economy?

MON, APR 3

21. Russia's Petro-State in Comparative Perspective

WED, APR 5

22. Demographic Shifts & Social Trends

MON, APR 10 *[THIRD PAPER DUE HERE]*

23. Federalism, Regionalism, and Nationalism

WED, APR 12

24. Post-Communist Pathways: Russia in the Mirror of Eastern Europe and China

MON, APR 17

25. Russia and the West: Cold War Redux? Or 'Normal' Great Power Politics?

WED, APR 19

26. The Ukrainian Dilemma: Rebuilding Empire? Or Dueling with NATO

MON, APR 24

27. How Will the Ukraine War end? What Will Follow? (part lecture, part discussion)

WED, APR 26

28. What Lies Ahead? The Former Soviet Union After Putin

*>> FOURTH & FINAL PAPER DUE 5 pm on Friday, MAY 5, 2023
(but please submit earlier if you are finished to facilitate grading)*