

POP88104: Russian Politics under Putin
Hilary Term 2025

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Office Hours: Mondays 3pm-4pm or by appointment

Class will be held TBA

Module Description

After over 70 years of Soviet communist rule, in the 1990s the Russian Federation found itself struggling with political disintegration, chaotic democracy, and caustic legacies of a planned economy. This course explores the evolution of Russian politics under Vladimir Putin—from the transition from Yeltsin’s Russia in the 1990s to the evolutions of the “vertical of power” in Putin’s third term in office. This module covers topics including how the Putin regime has involved corruption in Russia, “petropolitics,” electoral fraud, and new social movements.

Assessment

Participation (20%)

Student attendance, participation, and discussion is crucial to this seminar. Students are expected to have read all required readings before class. You should plan on digging in deeply with each reading—you are advised to develop critiques of readings, connections between them, suggestions for improvement or future research, and to build links to other political science research before you arrive to discuss them with the group in class.

Students will be evaluated on the *quality* of their input in discussions. Asking questions, bringing evidence, explaining your views and thoughts, and debating issues of significance, relevance, research design, real-world applicability, accuracy, and other factors will be important in participating fully.

Response Paper (15%)

Students will be required to submit one response paper over the five weeks of the module. This paper should **not** offer a summary of the readings for that week, but, rather, they should engage with the readings. Critiques, establishment of connections between readings, and other insightful thoughts coming from a critical perspective are all good elements to include, where appropriate. See above guidelines for in-class participation—these may be helpful for the response papers as well. Response papers should engage with multiple required readings for that week, and can also include suggesting readings.

Each response paper should be around 600-900 words in length, double-spaced in 12pt font. They should be submitted to Blackboard **by midnight on the Tuesday** before class (i.e., the night before class). Late submissions will be penalized up to 5 points per day late.

In-class Presentation (15%)

Students will each make one **short**, live presentation to the class in weeks 2-5 of the mini-term. You will be assigned one reading from the required (or possibly recommended) readings for the week you choose. In that week of class, you will give your presentation to class in order to facilitate discussion. These presentations will be about 5 minutes each, with around two slides.

Your presentation should have two parts, each likely with one slide:

1. Offer critical comments on the reading. What did you like or not like? What didn't make sense or do you not understand? What doesn't fit with other readings or things you know? How might this line of thinking be challenged, refuted, extended, or expanded?
2. Provide 2-5 substantial discussion questions for the class. These could include things like the questions above, or points for clarification, or debates that the reading brings up, etc.

You should not spend much time – even better, zero time – summarizing the reading. Assume that everyone has read it already. If you are assigned a recommended reading that others won't necessarily have read, you may want to do a *very brief* summary of some of its main points.

Final paper (50%)

Students are required to submit a final paper at the end of the mini-term. The paper should show engagement with the material from across the mini-module as well as readings, concepts, and ideas from the recommended reading list and/or other sources.

The essay should be about 2,400 words in length (no less than 2000 and no more than 2700 words) including everything but the reference list; double-spaced in 12pt font. The deadline for submission to Blackboard is **11:59pm (midnight) on Friday, March 1**. Creativity, clear and strong argumentation, a good structure, and clear writing are important features of a good essay. The essay should not focus on literature review, historical narrative (or other narrative rather than analytical approaches), or pure summarization. I want to hear your thoughts and analysis!

CLASS SCHEDULE

1. From Yeltsin to Putin 3.0: Personalism, 'The Vertical of Power,' and Competing Centers of Power

Required reading:

- Graeme Gill. "The Yeltsin era." In *Routledge handbook of Russian politics and society*. Gill, Graeme J., and James Young, eds. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.

- Timothy Frye. *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*. Princeton University Press, 2022. Chapters 1-4, pp. 11-65.
- Daniel Treisman. “Introduction: Rethinking Putin’s Political Order.” In *The New Autocracy*, ed. Daniel Treisman. 2018.

Recommended:

- Peter Rutland, “Putin’s Path to Power.” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2000, 16, 4.
- Marshall Goldman. 2008. *Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia*. Oxford University Press. Pages 93-123.

Additional reading:

- Joshua Yaffa. *Between Two Fires: Truth, Ambition, and Compromise in Putin's Russia*. Prologue.
- Vladimir Gel’man. “There will be no elite split.” *Riddle*. <https://ridl.io/there-will-be-no-elite-split/>
- Andrei Soldatov and Michael Rochlitz. “The *Siloviki* in Russian Politics.” In *The New Autocracy*, ed. Daniel Treisman. 2018.
- Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman. “Russia: A Normal Country: Russia After Communism.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Winter 2005. 19:1, 151-174.
- Ivan Krastev and Gleb Pavlovsky. 2018 “The Arrival of Post-Putin Russia.” European Council on Foreign Relations.

2. State and Society: Discontent, Civil Society, and Stagnation

Required reading:

- Vladimir Gel'man. 2015. "Political Opposition in Russia: A Troubled Transformation." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67:2, 177-191. You don't need to do a deep read here, but make sure you get the basics.
- Robertson, Graeme and Samuel Greene. "The Kremlin Emboldened: How Putin Wins Support." *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 28 no. 4, 2017, p. 86-100.
- Hale, Henry E. "The myth of mass Russian support for autocracy: The public opinion foundations of a hybrid regime." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 8 (2011): 1357-1375.
- Gilbert, Leah. "Civil society and the state." In *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*, pp. 398-409. Routledge, 2022.
- Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz. *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*. Oxford University Press, 2020. Pages 1-24.

Recommended, at least in part:

- Alexei Navalny and FBK. "Putin's palace. History of world's largest bribe" YouTube video, 1 hour 53 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipAnwilMncl>
- Graeme Robertson. 2013. "Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011 – 2012 in Broader Perspective." *Problems of Post-Communism*, 60(2).

Additional reading:

- Anton Sobolev and Alexei Zakharov. "Civic and Political Activism in Russia." In *The New Autocracy*, ed. Daniel Treisman. 2018.
- Samuel Greene 2017 "From Boom to Bust: Hardship, Mobilization & Russia's Social Contract," *Daedulus*
- Greene, Samuel A., and Graeme B. Robertson. *Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia*. Yale University Press, 2019. Chapter 1.
- Robert W. Orttung. 2013. "Navalny's Campaign to be Moscow Mayor," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 136, September 16, 2-5.
- Brian Taylor. 2013. "Putin's Crackdown," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no.277, September.
- March, Luke. 2009. "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition" *Slavic Review*. 69(3)
- Graeme B. Robertson. 2009. "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia" *Slavic Review*
- Regina Smyth, "Beyond United Russia," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no.302, September 2013

3. Russia's Political Economy

Required reading:

- David Szakonyi. 2018. "Governing Business: The State and Business in Russia." FPRI Research Paper.
- Daniel Treisman. 2010. "Is Russia Cursed by Oil?" *Journal of International Affairs*, 63 (2).

- Lamberova, Natalia, and Konstantin Sonin. "The role of business in shaping economic policy." In *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin's Russia*, pp. 137-158. 2018.
- Marshall Goldman. 2004. "Putin and the Oligarchs," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec 2004.

Recommended reading:

- Frye, Timothy, Ora John Reuter, and David Szakonyi. "Political machines at work voter mobilization and electoral subversion in the workplace." *World politics* 66, no. 2 (2014): 195-228.
- Sergei Guriev and Aleh Tsyvinski, "Challenges Facing the Russian Economy after the Crisis" in Anders Åslund, Sergei Guriev, and Andrew C. Kuchins (eds.) *Russia After the Global Crisis*. Peterson Institute.

Additional reading:

- Daniel Treisman, "Putin's Silovarchs," *Orbis* 5, 1 (2008)
- Noah Buckley. 2018. "Corruption and Power in Russia." FPRI Research Paper.
- Jordan Gans-Morse, "Threats to Property Rights in Russia: From Private Coercion to State Aggression," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, 3 (2012): 263-295.
- Vadim Volkov. 1999. "Violent Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 5.
- Gel'man and Zavadskaya. "Explaining Bad Governance in Russia: Institutions and Incentives". PONARS policy memo. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/explaining-bad-governance-in-russia-institutions-and-incentives/>
- Timothy Frye and Andrei Shleifer. 1997. "The Invisible Hand and the Grabbing Hand." *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings*. 554-559
- Timothy Frye. 2010. "Corruption and Rule of Law" in Anders Åslund, Sergei Guriev, and Andrew C. Kuchins (eds.) *Russia After the Global Crisis* Peterson Institute
- Peter Rutland and Natasha Kogan 1998. "The Russian Mafia: Between Hype and Reality," *Transitions Online*
- Sergei Cheloukhine and Joseph King "Corruption networks as a sphere of investment activities in modern Russia" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*
- Vadim Volkov. 2014. 'The Russian Mafia: Rise and Extinction' in Paoli L. *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*. Oxford University Press.
- Clifford Gaddy and Barry Ickes, *Russia's Virtual Economy* (Brookings Institution Press, 2002)

4. Spheres of Influence and Russia's International Presence

Required reading:

- Daniel Treisman. 2011. *The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev*. Chapter 9.
- Fyodor Lukyanov. 2016. "Putin's Foreign Policy: the Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place" *Foreign Affairs*.
- Kanet, Roger E. "Russian foreign policy and the challenge to the existing world order 1." In *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*, pp. 477-488. Routledge, 2022.

Recommended reading:

- Andrei Tsygankov. 2015. “Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 31:4, 279-303.
- Dominic Lieven. “Outside in, inside out: Russia as an empire on the periphery.” *Engelsberg Ideas*. February 28, 2022. <https://engelsbergideas.com/essays/outside-in-inside-out-russia-as-an-empire-on-the-periphery/>
- Rob Lee. 2022. “Moscow’s Compellence Strategy.” FPRI. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/01/moscows-compellence-strategy/>

Additional reading:

- Adam Tooze. 2022. “Chartbook #68 Putin's Challenge to Western hegemony - the 2022 edition.” <https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-68-putins-challenge-to>
- Michael McFaul, Stephen Stestanovich, and John Mearsheimer. 2014. “Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?” *Foreign Affairs* 93.6.
- Dmitri Trenin. 2010. "Russian Foreign Policy: Modernization or Marginalization?" in Anders Åslund, Sergei Guriev, and Andrew C. Kuchins (eds.) *Russia After the Global Crisis* Peterson Institute
- John Mearsheimer. 2014. “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin” *Foreign Affairs* 93.5

5. Russian Aggression Abroad

Required reading:

- Busygina and Filippov. “Nested Games? The Inconsistencies of Russian Foreign Policy in Eurasia”. PONARS policy memo. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/nested-games-the-inconsistencies-of-russian-foreign-policy-in-eurasia/>
- Kathryn Stoner. “How Much Should We Worry About a Resurrected Russia? More Than You Might Think.” PONARS policy memo. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/how-much-should-we-worry-about-a-resurrected-russia-more-than-you-might-think/>
- Daniel Treisman. “Crimea: Anatomy of a Decision.” In *The New Autocracy*, ed. Daniel Treisman. 2018.
- Putin, Vladimir. “Full text: Putin’s declaration of war on Ukraine.” *The Spectator*. February 24, 2022. See Blackboard or try this link: <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67828>
Or you can watch it with subtitles at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qS6J-WbTD8>
- McGlynn Jade. 2023. *Russia's War*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 1.

Additional reading:

- Michael McFaul, Stephen Stestanovich, and John Mearsheimer. 2014. “Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?” *Foreign Affairs* 93.6.
- Margot Light, *Developments in Russian Politics* 7 “Chapter 13: Foreign Policy.”
- Richard Sakwa, “‘New Cold War’ or twenty years’ crisis? Russia and international politics”, *International Affairs*, Volume 84, Issue 2, March 2008, Pages 241–267
- Dmitri Trenin. 2010. "Russian Foreign Policy: Modernization or Marginalization?" in Anders Åslund, Sergei Guriev, and Andrew C. Kuchins (eds.) *Russia After the Global Crisis* Peterson Institute