

PO88104: Russian Politics under Putin
Hilary Term 2025

Instructor: Dr. Noah Buckley

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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 Papers (20%)

Final paper (60%)

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 exact assignment for the final paper will be distributed by next week.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.