

POLITICAL SCIENCE 533
SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET POLITICS
Spring 2006: MW 5:30-7:18 pm
180 Baker Systems Engineering Building

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This comparative politics course will examine the sudden collapse of the Soviet system in December 1991, as well as the post-communist politics and economics of the Russian Federation, the main successor state of the now defunct Soviet Union. It will focus on recent political and economic developments in the Russian Federation, including the building of new representative and market-economy institutions. The transition to democracy and capitalism appeared to be in a lot of trouble under the first post-Soviet President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999). Yeltsin's presidential coup d'état of September-October 1993, the tragic war in Chechnya, the contested presidential election of 1996, a catastrophic budgetary crisis, the financial and currency meltdown of August 1998, growing social unrest, and other destabilizing events signaled the initial failure of the democratic-capitalist experiment in Russia.

But incumbent President Vladimir Putin (2000-present) has presided over the restoration of regime effectiveness and legitimacy, of popular support and elite consensus, as well as the country's political and economic stability, sometimes using methods that are questionable from a democratic point of view. In spite of persistent problems like Chechen terrorism, the flight of Russian capital abroad, influential "godfather" tycoons known as the "oligarchs," social inequality and injustice, violent crime and low living standards, Russia's prospects for the future seem a lot brighter now than just six years ago. Putin's stabilization policies have been helped by rising commodity prices on world markets, especially of crude oil and natural gas. Finally, the course will explore the future outlook for the Russian Federation, which is undergoing major and sometimes controversial reforms at home, as well as for its successful integration into the globalized capitalist economy.

GENERAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Social science courses draw upon multiple disciplines to enrich students' experiences of the contemporary world. In thematic upper-division courses (like this one) students synthesize and apply knowledge from diverse scientific disciplines to contemporary political issues by conducting research on and writing research papers about these contemporary issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

It is important that you do your readings before class and attend class regularly. The lectures and videos will provide material that is not included in the assigned readings. Absences from class will affect your final grade, especially in cases of “borderline” grades (which happen to be the majority of all grades). Students who miss six or more of the regular class meetings will receive automatically a failing grade for the class even if they have a medical or other valid excuse. The “**six strikes and you are out**” rule will be applied to all students without exception (attendance will be taken regularly).

You are responsible for all the required readings and the material, including the videos, covered in class. Class will include as much discussion as possible. In addition to class attendance and participation, you will be graded on the basis of your performance on a midterm examination, a research paper, and a research paper presentation in class:

Midterm examination – 35%
Research paper presentation in class – 20%
Research paper – 45%

Letter grades, rather than percentages, will be used in grading the exams. The final course grade will be calculated by using the University’s numerical grading scale:

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|-------------|---|-----|---------------|---|-----|
| A (100-94%) | = | 4.0 | C (76-74%) | = | 2.0 |
| A- (93-90%) | = | 3.7 | C- (73-70%) | = | 1.7 |
| B+ (89-87%) | = | 3.3 | D+ (69-67%) | = | 1.3 |
| B (86-84%) | = | 3.0 | D (66-60%) | = | 1.0 |
| B- (83-80%) | = | 2.7 | E (below 60%) | = | 0.0 |
| C+ (79-77%) | = | 2.3 | | | |

The midterm exam, tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, May 3, will consist of ten questions drawn from the lectures, the videos, and the course readings. A make-up examination will be given only with a valid medical excuse (including a doctor’s note) and prior notice, or in case of well-documented dire emergency.

Starting immediately after the midterm exam, each student will present a 15-minute oral version of their research paper’s findings for the benefit of the rest of the class. Students must also submit a one-page written summary of their research findings to the instructor before their class presentation—preferably along with a printout of all PowerPoint or overhead projector slides (if any). During their presentations in class, students will answer questions about their research findings from other students and from the instructor (to be followed by a short discussion, if possible). Class presentations and the written summaries will be graded on factual content, style, and grammar in accordance with the “grading criteria” handouts.

The written assignment must examine an issue of post-Soviet Russian politics and economics of your choice. Students will work on an individual basis with the instructor in order to formulate an appropriate topic and a working bibliography. A paper written without its topic having been

approved by the instructor will receive a failing grade. To receive a passing grade, the research paper (which will be discussed further in class) must be **at least 10 full pages** in length (not counting the title page or the bibliography), typewritten, double-spaced, default-formatted, stapled, proofread, spell-checked, and appropriately referenced (using footnotes, or endnotes, or parenthetical references). Short quotations (up to three lines) should be kept within the paragraph and must have quotation marks and a source. Longer quotations (more than three lines) must be written as separate paragraphs that are single-spaced and indented (a source is required, but not quotations marks). There must be at least five different sources in the bibliography. Be sure to include a title page with your name, date, and course number.

I will read and comment on preliminary drafts only if they are turned in sufficiently early. A hard copy of the research paper must be submitted on the last scheduled class meeting, Wednesday, May 31. No e-mailed copies of research papers, preliminary drafts, or class presentation summaries will be accepted without a prior agreement with the instructor. Deducting a third of a letter grade for each day past the due date will penalize any paper received late. The research paper will be graded on factual content, style, and grammar in accordance with the “grading criteria” handouts.

All forms of academic dishonesty will be punished in accordance with the relevant university regulations. All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating (crib notes, etc.) or plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation or quotation marks) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be promptly reported to the university committee on academic misconduct and handled according to university policy. If you have any questions about this policy, please consult the instructor.

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disabilities Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus during the quarter. Any changes will be announced in class in advance.

REQUIRED READINGS

The following two books are required for this class and are available for purchase at a campus bookstore near you:

Thomas F. Remington, *Politics in Russia*, Longman, 2006 (4th edition).

Bertram Silverman and Murray Yanovitch, *New Rich, New Poor, New Russia*. Sharpe, 2000 (2nd expanded edition).

Both books have been placed on closed reserve at the Main Library. Additional required readings may be distributed in class.

CLASS SCHEDULE

I. Introduction to the Course – March 27

II. The Soviet System and its Demise in December 1991 – March 29

Remington, Chs. 1-2

III. Post-Soviet Russian Politics and Economics (1992-present)

1. Building the Institutions of the New Russian State – April 3, 5, 10

Remington, Chs. 3-6

2. Russia's Transformation under Yeltsin and Putin – April 12, 17, 19

Remington, Chs. 7-9

3. The Political Economy of the Transition – April 24, 26, May 1

Silverman and Yanovitch (entire book)

MIDTERM EXAM – Wednesday, May 3, in class

IV. Student Presentations of Research Paper Findings in Class – May 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24

Memorial Day, May 29 – no class

V. Conclusion: Prospects for Post-Communist Russia's Future – May 31

RESEARCH PAPERS DUE IN CLASS – Wednesday, May 31