Russian Politics: From Dictatorship to Democracy…and Back Again

In this introduction to the study of Russian politics, we will explore how a single person – Vladimir Putin - has come to dominate the national stage, while opposition politicians are jailed, human rights are violated, and journalists fall victim to assassins’ bullets. In many ways, Russia appears to have started turning back into a dictatorship only 15 years after throwing off seven decades of repressive communist party rule. Why and how has this happened? Through lectures, discussions, and films, we will examine contemporary Russia’s politics, economics, and political culture. The course will cover Russia’s history from 1917 to 1991, but our main focus will be on the contemporary period.

Course Requirements

You will be graded on the following:
Class participation (15%)
Study questions (15%)
Two brief “mini-papers” (5% each)
Midterm exam (30%)
Research paper (30%)

• Detailed descriptions of the course requirements can be found at the end of the syllabus.
• The readings for each week's class are specified on the syllabus. Please complete the readings on time, and bring the syllabus and relevant readings to class each day.
• We will be discussing current events in this class. Every student in this course will need to have a source of news about Russia. Most major news outlets (such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, and the BBC) regularly run stories about Russia. Another source of Russian news and analysis in English is Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), featuring current and archived articles from the U.S. and Russian press: http://russialist.org/russia/russian-news/.

Course Readings

There are six books for the course, available at the Clark University Bookstore (or feel free to buy them used or in e-book form):

Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon (Scribner, 2006; published originally in 1941).
Valerie Sperling, Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia (Oxford, 2015).

All the other readings on the syllabus can be found under Section 3 (“Assigned Readings”) of our MOODLE course website (http://MOODLE.clarku.edu).
WEEK 1  Jan 18:  Introduction.

WEEK 2  Jan 25:  Soviet History: from Marx through Stalin.
*Study Questions for Week 2 Due Today.*

**Topic 1:** Marxism and the Russian Revolution.
**Reading:** •McAuley, Soviet Politics, Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2.
•Remington, Politics in Russia, Chapter 2, pp. 31-47 (6th ed., pp. 31-47).

**Topic 2:** Stalin and the Revolution from Above.
**Reading:** •McAuley, Soviet Politics, Chapter 3, Chapter 4.

**Topic 3:** Stalin in the 21st Century
**Reading:** •David Hoffman, “Stalin Rises from the Ashes in Putin’s Russia,” *The Moscow Times*, April 14, 2015.
*Note: Start reading Koestler, Darkness at Noon*

WEEK 3  Feb 1:  Stalinist Terror: Was Stalinism the inevitable result of Bolshevism?
*Study Questions for Week 3 Due Today.*
**Reading:** •Koestler, Darkness at Noon (entire)

**In-Class Film:** *The Life and Times of Jozef Stalin.*

WEEK 4  Feb 8:  The Soviet System after Stalin.
*1st Mini-Paper Due Today*
*Study Questions for Week 4 Due Today.*

**Topic 1:** Khrushchev’s Thaw and Brezhnev’s Stagnation.
**Reading:** •McAuley, Soviet Politics, Chapter 5, Chapter 6.

**Topic 2:** The Roots of Reform -- What was wrong with the old Soviet system?
**Reading:** •McAuley, Soviet Politics, Chapter 7.
•Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-57.
•Optional: Explore Ilya Utekhin’s website about communal apartments. We will look at “Where Daddy Used to Live” in our next class.

WEEK 5  Feb 15: Gorbachev’s Reforms -- Perestroika and Glasnost.
*Study Questions for Week 5 Due Today.*
**Reading:** •Dear Comrade Editor, pp. 1-33 and pp. 80-90.
•Nina Andreeva, “I Cannot Forgo My Principles.”
•Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Chapter 3, pp. 58-85.

**In-class Film:** *Little Vera.*

WEEK 6  Feb 22:  The End of the Beginning
Study Questions for Week 6 Due Today.

Topic 1: The Obstacles to Reform: Economic Failures and the Rise of Nationalism.
Reading: •Suny, “State, Civil Society and Ethnic Cultural Consolidation in the USSR: Roots of the National Question.”
•“Beyond Perestroika: the Soviet Economy in Crisis”

Reading: •McAuley, Soviet Politics, Chapter 8 and Conclusion.
•Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Chapter 4, pp. 86-112.

Topic 3: Could the Soviet Union have survived? Why did it collapse?
Reading: •Dallin, “Causes of the Collapse of the USSR.”
•Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Chapter 7, pp. 169-192.

WEEK 7 Mar 1: MIDTERM EXAM
In-class Film (following the midterm exam): Frontline: Putin’s Way (2014).

MIDTERM BREAK, March 6-10; No Class on March 8.

WEEK 8 Mar 15: Politics in Russia, Part I: Prospects for Democracy in the 1990s.
Study Questions for Week 8 Due Today.

Topic 1: Were the 1990s the beginning of democracy or the end of it?
Reading: •“State Department to hold Enemy Tryouts Next Week,” The Onion, October 21, 1998.
•Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Chapter 6, pp. 141-168.
•Gelman, Authoritarian Russia, Preface, Chapters 1-2, pp. xi-42.
•Sperling, Sex, Politics, and Putin, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-79.

Reading: •Gelman, Authoritarian Russia, Chapter 3, pp. 43-70.

Topic 3: Political Institutions and Elections in the 1990s.
Reading: •Remington, Politics in Russia, Chapter 3: pp. 56-73 (6th ed, pp. 57-74).


2nd Mini-Paper Due Today
Study Questions for Week 9 Due Today.

• Gelman, Authoritarian Russia, Chapters 4-5, pp. 71-128.
• Sperling, Sex, Politics, and Putin, Chapter 3, pp. 80-124.

Topic 2: Political Institutions and Elections in the 2000s: from Parties to Patronage.
Reading: • Remington, Politics in Russia, pp. 1-5 (6th ed., pp. 1-2) (Putin/Medvedev)

Topic 3: Protest and Political Repression under Putin.
• “Russian election: Biggest protests since fall of USSR,” BBC News, 10 December 2011.
• Laura Smith-Spark, “Russian court imprisons Pussy Riot band members on hooliganism charges,” CNN, August 18, 2012.
• Peter Hobson, “Most Russians Want Homosexuals Liquidated or Ostracized,” The Moscow Times, October 11, 2015.

Topic 4: Debate: Is Russia a Democracy or a Dictatorship?

WEEK 10 Mar 29: Economics in Post-Soviet Russia: From Oligarchs to Oil.
Study Questions for Week 10 Due Today.
In-class Film: Return of the Czar.

Topic 1: Attempting to Create a Market Economy: The New Russia in the 1990s.
Reading: • Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, Chapter 5, pp. 113-140; Epilogue, pp. 193-220.

Topic 2: Putin’s Record: Russia’s Economy in the 21st Century.
Guest Speaker: Professor Peter Rutland (Wesleyan University)
Reading: • Remington, Politics in Russia, pp. 158-160 (on Khodorkovsky and Yukos) (6th ed, pp. 159-161).
• Yulia Latynina, “Why Russia’s Olympic Flame is a Flub,” The Moscow Times, November 6, 2013.

WEEK 11 Apr 5 Civil Society in Russia: Gender and Organizing.
Study Questions for Week 11 Due Today.
Reading: • Valerie Sperling, Sex, Politics, and Putin (Oxford University Press, 2015), Chapters 5, 6, and Conclusion (pp. 169-309).
• AP, ”Chechnya’s Leader Looking for Second Wife,” February 24, 2011.
• Ian Bateson, “Putin signs law banning advertisements for abortion in Russia,” NBCnews.com, November 25, 2013.
Films: There are Women in Russian Villages.

WEEK 12 Apr 12: Patriotism, Militarism, Nationalism, Political Ideology and Foreign Policy.
Study Questions for Week 12 and Your Proposed Research Paper Topic Due Today.
Topic 1: Foreign Policy

- Russian Analytical Digest, "Russia and the US Election," December 9, 2016, pp. 2-14 (three short analyses of Russia and the US election, plus opinion polls).

Topic 2: Patriotism, Militarism, Nationalism and the Politics of the Past under Putin

Guest Speaker: Professor Nina Tumarkin (Wellesley College)

Reading:

- Sperling, Sex, Politics, and Putin, Chapter 4, pp. 125-168.
- Remington, Politics in Russia, Chapter 5, pp. 117-143 (6th ed., pp. 120-146).

WEEK 13 Apr 19: Chechnya and the Rule of Law.

Study Questions for Week 13 Due Today.

Topic 1: Building a New Federation? The Continuing War in Chechnya.

Reading:

- Remington, Politics in Russia, pp. 73-82 (6th ed., pp. 74-83).

READINGS FOR TODAY CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE...

WEEK 13 Apr 19: Chechnya and the Rule of Law, continued.

- Arch Puddington, “Little to celebrate in Kadyrov’s Chechnya,” Freedom House,
October 18, 2011.

In-Class Film: Prisoner of the Mountains

Topic 2: Russia and the Rule of Law.
Reading: • Remington, Politics in Russia, Chapter 8, pp. 219-245 (6th ed., pp. 222-248).
• Julia Ioffe, “Net Impact” [on anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny], The New Yorker, April 4, 2011.

WEEK 14 Apr 26: Whither Russia? Russia before and after Putin’s Presidency.
A Draft or Detailed Outline of the Research Paper is Due Today.
Student Research Paper Presentations: Are conditions in Russia better than they were in the mid-to-late-1990s?

THE RESEARCH PAPER IS DUE ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 3 AT NOON, IN MY MAILBOX IN THE POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT.

DETAILED COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

• Class Participation.
This class is held only once a week, which means that attendance and active class participation are mandatory. Missing more than one class is cause for a failing grade in class participation.

• Study Questions.
Weekly written assignments based on the readings will be intended to facilitate class discussion, and will be due at the beginning of class each week. Your responses will not be graded, but will be expected to be of sufficient quality to deserve credit. The study questions are in a single document on our MOODLE website under Topic 2, titled Study Questions and Mini-Paper Assignments. If you hand a study question in late, you will receive half credit for it if you hand it in on or before the day of the midterm (if it was assigned before the midterm), or by the last day of class (if it was assigned after the midterm). Note that these assignments cannot be hand-written – please use a printer. However, if you are late to class because you were delayed while printing out your assignment, your assignment will be counted as late.

• Mini-Papers.
These two short (2-page) papers are due at the beginning of class in Week 4 (February 8) and Week 9 (March 22). The assigned questions can be found within the Study Questions and Mini Paper Assignments document for those weeks. These mini-papers will be graded. Mini-papers handed in late will lose one-half grade per day.
Research Paper.
A draft or detailed outline of the research paper is due on the last day of class – April 26. (I will not collect these, but will check off that you have done the work). We will be discussing the findings of your research papers in class. The research paper itself is due on Wednesday, May 3, at noon, in my mailbox in the Political Science Department. Late research papers will be graded down one full grade per day without exception. The paper should be 10-12 double-spaced typed pages in length.

In this paper, you will choose a topic (in consultation with me) and address the following questions:

With regard to your topic, in what ways have conditions changed from the mid-to-late 1990s to the present? What precisely has changed (improved, deteriorated), and why?

To write a good paper, you will need to make an argument with a clear and strong thesis statement in the introduction, and then prove/support your thesis throughout the rest of the paper. Please put your thesis statement in bold print. The body of the paper should address the substance of the topic in the mid-to-late 1990s (roughly 1994-1998), and then explain how and why things have changed between then and now with regard to that issue. If you argue that conditions have improved or deteriorated, you will need to explain concretely what constitutes improvement or deterioration (e.g. explain what you mean by “better” or “worse”). Also, as you can see, the research question contains both a “what” and a “why.” You will therefore need to include both clear description (“what”) and sensible analysis (“why”).

In writing the paper, you will need to draw on at least two peer-reviewed articles (in addition to any class readings) on your topic, as well as books and news articles from reputable sources. Relevant peer-reviewed journals that you can access through Clark’s library system include: Post-Soviet Affairs, Europe-Asia Studies, Demokratizatsiya, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Slavic Review, Russian Social Science Review, Problems of Post-Communism, Journal of Democracy, World Politics, Comparative Politics, Comparative Political Studies, Political Science Quarterly, and American Political Science Review. Do not refer to class lectures in your paper. If you don’t know how to access peer-reviewed articles through Clark’s library system, the research librarians are very happy to help you! Don’t wait until the last minute, however.

Grammar, spelling, and organization count toward your paper grade, so it is in your best interests to proofread your paper (or ask someone else to do so) and correct it before handing it in. Your paper should have citations (footnotes, endnotes, or in-text citations), and should include a complete list of sources. If you have any doubts about how to properly footnote a research paper, please ask me for advice or consult the Writing Center. Be sure to provide citations—including page numbers-- for all quotations, paraphrases, and factual information that is not extremely common knowledge. Failure to provide full and accurate citations is considered plagiarism and is grounds for failing the course.

General research paper topics to choose from include:

- Russian Civil Society
- NGOs and Russia
- The Russian Parliament
- The Russian Electoral System
- Party Development in Russia
- Political Representation in Russia
Keep in mind that a more specific topic is likely to generate a better research question and paper. Thus a paper comparing the status of women in Russia’s parliament is likely to be better than one on “women and Russia” in general.

**Web-Based Resources**
The following English-language resources may be useful to you, both for your research paper, and for ongoing news in Russia:


• Professor Peter Rutland’s website includes his research papers on multiple topics, plus his archived articles for The Jamestown Foundation: [http://prutland.web.wesleyan.edu/research.htm](http://prutland.web.wesleyan.edu/research.htm)


• Russian Public Opinion Polls and Election Results (from a reliable source, but not all updated) [http://www.russiavotes.org/](http://www.russiavotes.org/) and (from a reliable Russian source but with limited information compared to what’s available on their Russian-language site): [http://www.levada.ru/eng/](http://www.levada.ru/eng/)


• If you want to watch Kremlin-sponsored TV in English, check out: [http://rt.com/](http://rt.com/) Note: it used to be called “Russia Today,” and is now just the neutral “RT.”

• The Russian President’s website (including news) is: [http://eng.kremlin.ru/](http://eng.kremlin.ru/)

When researching your papers or looking at current events, make use of the Russian press translated into English, too, through Lexis-Nexis Academic database. The database is *searchable* which makes researching news past and present much easier.

Some of the relevant sources available through Lexis-Nexis include: RIA Novosti, Interfax,
ITAR-TASS, Russian Press Digest, The Moscow Times, and the Official Kremlin International News Broadcasts. Note that these are English translations of original Russian language sources (except The Moscow Times, which is published in English).

How to search for news articles in these sources:

• Go to the Goddard Library website.
• Click on Articles and Databases.
• Click on Lexis-Nexis Academic.
• Go to Source Directory (at the top) and click “Find or Browse.”
• There are two ways to proceed from here:
  • If you want to search sources individually, click “Find” under Source Directory, and then type the name of the source (e.g. The Moscow Times) into the “Keyword” box and click “Find Sources.”
  • Once the list of sources appears, check the box next to the one or ones you want, and then click the red box that says, “OK - Continue.”
  • You can then enter your search terms and limit the dates.
  • Then click the stories that interest you.
  • Their publication information will come up on the left (author, source, date, etc.).
  • NOTE: Do not cite these sources as “Lexis-Nexis” – instead cite them properly, using the publication information.

• If you want to search multiple sources at once, then under Source Directory, click “Browse.”
  • Where it says “Filter by,” put in “Russia” under “Country.”
  • Either choose a specific topic from the topics list, or “All topics.”
  • Under “Select a category to view sources,” click “News.”
  • Then click “Newspapers.”
  • Moscow News, Moscow Times, and Russica - Russian Press Digest will come up (among others).
  • Check the box next to the ones you want, and then click the red box that says, “OK-Continue.”
  • Enter your search terms and proceed as above.

Note: You can get RIA Novosti, TASS, and the Official Kremlin International News Broadcasts by clicking “Newswires” instead of “News” under “Select a category to view sources.”

Also note that the Research Librarians at Goddard have created a LibGuide for our course which will enable you to access some of these resources. You can find it via the Goddard Library website, or by clicking this link:
http://clarku.libguides.com/content.php?pid=34912&sid=256630