

**PLS 431 — Politics and Governance of the Russian Federation  
FALL 2023**

Course Instructor:

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Office Hours: Mondays, 12.00 - 14.00, Wednesdays, 12.00 - 14.00, Fridays, 13.00-14.00

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**Course Description**

Since the full-scale invasion in Ukraine, Russia has been at the spotlight of international media and experts trying to explain the roots of such a senseless behaviour. Regardless of an explanation, Russian war in Ukraine will have long-standing consequences for the global and regional order. In this course, using analytical frameworks developed by comparativists and international relations scholars, we will focus on the political foundations and dynamics of Vladimir Putin's regime including the Soviet legacy, economic transition from a planned to market economy, the waves of de- and recentralisation, the state-society relations, and foreign policy. This is an advanced writing-intensive course offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This course is designed to enhance students' overall knowledge of Russian politics from a comparative perspective.

**Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this course, the student:

1. Will acquire the knowledge and competence to systematically characterize, compare, and critically assess Russian domestic and foreign policy.
2. Will learn how to apply analytical tools to analyse the political trajectory of Russia.
3. Will develop a multidimensional understanding of Russia's governance structures, political actors, and key policy issues.
4. Will develop writing skills to produce policy memos and research essays on Russian politics.
5. Will be able to critically engage with expert and academic knowledge on Russian politics.
6. Will be able to work with their peers to critically discuss and debate different topics related to Russian domestic and foreign politics and policy.

**Course Required Readings:**

Treisman, D. (2012). *The Return: Russia's journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev*. Simon and Schuster.

The students are responsible to read the assigned material *before* each class. The lectures will not restate the information in the readings but build from the information you learned while reading. The readings complement the lectures, and you will be required to know both to do well in the course. Discussions will be held on the assigned readings during the lectures and online.

*I reserve the right to change this syllabus, including the course schedule, readings, and due dates. All changes will be announced in class and via Moodle.*

*Recommended Readings:*

Tsygankov, A. P. (Ed.). (2018). Routledge handbook of Russian foreign policy. Routledge. (available online)

Zimmerman, W. (2014). Ruling Russia: Authoritarianism from the revolution to Putin. Princeton University Press. (hardcopy available)

**Course Requirements (undergraduate level):**

1. Three take-home quizzes will be assigned over the course of the semester. The class days on which take-home quizzes are assigned will be chosen by the professor. Students will be tasked with responding to a question within 3-5 days depending on the schedule. Students should incorporate all the assigned readings for the next class into their written responses. Quizzes should consist of 1000 words (approximately 4 pages). Students who do not submit their quizzes by the start of class will automatically lose 25 points. Students who do not submit their quizzes 24 hours after the deadline will receive a score of 0. Students must use footnotes for citations (any style), 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and a legible 12-point size font. Take-home quizzes are graded according to the following rubric:

<b>Grading</b>	<b>Assessments</b>
90-100	Student's understanding of the assigned readings is very extensive and clear; written response is cogent and creative; usage of proper citation format; question posed by the professor is answered by student in its entirety.
79-89	Student's understanding of the assigned readings is commendable yet also somewhat incomplete; written response is intelligible but lacks creativity; citation format is evident but not fully consistent either; question posed by the professor is largely answered by student.
60-79	Student's understanding of the assigned readings is intelligible but is evidently lacking; written response demonstrates that the student possesses a cursory grasp of the assigned readings; citation format is inconsistent and rather unprofessional; question posed by the professor is answered in a satisfactory manner.
40-59	Student's understanding of the assigned readings is poor and lacking; written response is largely unintelligible; question posed by the professor is largely unanswered by the student.
0-39	Student's understanding of the assigned readings is very poor or nonexistent; written response is virtually unintelligible; question posed by the professor is not answered at all.

2. Students will be tasked with composing two policy memos of 1000 words (approximately 4 pages) based on the class discussions and a question posed by the professor. Students must use 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-point size font. Policy memos are due one week after announcement of the topic. Failure to meet the deadlines will be penalised by 25

points. All policy briefs that are submitted after the deadline will receive a score of 0. Policy memos will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

<b>Grading</b>	<b>Assessments</b>
90-100	Student's understanding of the topic is very extensive and clear; policy memo is cogent and creative and reflects the content of the course; usage of proper citation format; question posed by the professor is answered by student in its entirety.
79-89	Student's understanding of the topic is commendable yet also somewhat incomplete; policy memo is intelligible but lacks creativity and/or full coverage of the course's content; citation format is evident but not fully consistent either; question posed by the professor is largely answered by student.
60-79	Student's understanding of the topic is intelligible but has logical gaps and lacks deep understanding of the course's content; policy memo demonstrates that the student possesses a cursory grasp of the assigned readings; citation format is inconsistent and rather unprofessional; question posed by the professor is answered in a satisfactory manner.
40-59	Student's understanding of the topic is poor and lacking; policy memo is largely unintelligible; question posed by the professor is largely unanswered by the student.
0-39	Student's understanding of the topic is very poor or nonexistent; policy memo is virtually unintelligible; question posed by the professor is not answered at all.

4. Students will be tasked with writing a research essay of 2,500 words (approximately 10 pages) focusing on various aspects of Russian domestic/foreign politics. Students must use footnotes for citations (any style), 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-point size font. Research essays are to be submitted by the start of class via Moodle on **November 17, 2023 at 5 PM**. Students are required to use a combination of sources included in the syllabus and outside it. Students who do not submit their work on time will lose 25 points. Students who do not submit their work 24 hours after the deadline will receive a score of 0. A bibliography is required for this assignment. The research essay will be graded according to the following rubric:

<b>Grading</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
90-100	Student writes in a very coherent and creative manner; usage of proper citation format; paper has a full introduction and a conclusion; few or no grammatical and/or spelling errors in student's work; student references scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus readings and critically analyzes the works of other scholars.
79-89	Student writes in an intelligible manner but his/her work is also lacking in creativity; citation format is evident but not fully consistent either; cursory introduction and conclusion; noticeable grammatical/spelling errors; student references some scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus in the form of a literature review to supplement his/her work; critical analysis of scholarly works is adequate.

60-79	Student barely writes in a satisfactory manner; paper is largely lacking in terms of an introduction and conclusion; citation format is inconsistent; grammatical/spelling errors are prevalent; references to scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus are quite lacking; critical analysis of other scholarly works is inadequate.
40-59	Student writes in a largely unintelligible manner; citation format suffers from serious flaws; brief/no introduction and/or conclusion; many grammatical/spelling errors; virtually no references to articles/texts outside of syllabus or critical analysis of other scholarly works.
0-39	Student writes in an unintelligible manner; citation format is nearly nonexistent; multiple grammatical/spelling errors; few/no references to scholarly articles/texts outside of syllabus; critical analysis is wholly inadequate in scope.

5. Students will be tasked to present their main idea for the research semester after the Fall break. Each student will be assigned a slot for a 5-7 minutes presentation that includes the research question, the preliminary thesis, the theoretical framework, and the evidence. The presentation will be followed by a peer discussion. Student who fail to present on their given slot will have a penalty of 25 points. The presentation will be graded according to the following rubric:

<b>Grading</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
90-100	Student presents a clear and feasible research question, which is novel and creative, a concise thesis with clear empirical expectations, a relevant theoretical framework with references to established scholarship, and propose evidence that is solid and speaks directly to the thesis.
79-89	Student presents a clear and feasible research questions, which might lack novelty; the thesis is clear but might not be full elaborated; the theoretical framework might suffer from minor inconsistencies; the evidence is solid but might miss slightly the thesis.
60-79	Student presents a clear thesis, which might not be feasible at the moment; the theoretical framework is adequate but lacks consistence and critical approach to the literature; the evidence is satisfactory but insufficient to support the thesis.
40-59	Student presents a thesis that lacks consistency; the theoretical framework is inadequate and/or based on irrelevant and insufficient literature; the evidence is weak and/or does not speak directly to the main thesis.
0-39	The research question is not formulated or formulated in an intelligible manner; the thesis is absent or formulated in unintelligible manner; the theoretical framework is absent or inadequate without references to the key scholarship; the evidence is absent or irrelevant to the main thesis.

**Grading:**

Class participation	10 %
Take-Home Quizzes (three)	15 %

Current events presentation	15 %
Policy memos (two)	20 %
Research Essay	30 %
Presentation	10 %

**Scale:**

A	95-100
A -	90-94
B +	85-89
B	80-84
B -	75-79
C +	70-74
C	65-69
D	55-59
D -	50-54
F	0-49

**Course Requirements (graduate level):**

1. Each graduate student will lead a 50-minutes discussion on one of the course's topics. Before the discussion, a list of questions reflecting the main topic and the assigned readings should be submitted via mail two days before the session.
2. Three take-home quizzes will be assigned over the course of the semester. The class days on which take-home quizzes are assigned will be chosen by the professor. Students will be tasked with responding to a question within 3-5 days depending on the schedule. Students should incorporate all the assigned readings for the next class into their written responses. Quizzes should consist of 1000 words (approximately 4 pages). Students who do not submit their quizzes by the start of class will automatically lose 25 points. Students who do not submit their quizzes 24 hours after the deadline will receive a score of 0. Students must use footnotes for citations (any style), 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and a legible 12-point size font. Quizzes will be evaluated on the same scale as for the undergrads.
3. Graduate students will be tasked with composing two policy memos of 1200 words (approximately 5 pages) based on the class discussions and a question posed by the professor. Students must use 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-point size font. Policy memos are due to one week after announcement of the topic. Failure to meet the deadlines will be penalised by 25 points. All policy briefs that are submitted after the deadline

will receive a score of 0. Policy memos will be evaluated on the same scale as for the undergrads.

4. Graduate students will be tasked with writing a research essay of 3,000 words (approximately 12 pages) focusing on various aspects of Russian domestic/foreign politics. Students must use footnotes for citations (any style), 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-point size font. Research essays are to be submitted by the start of class via Moodle on November 17, 2023 at 5 PM. Students are required to use a combination of sources included in the syllabus and outside it. Students who do not submit their work on time will lose 25 points. Students who do not submit their work 24 hours after the deadline will receive a score of 0. A bibliography is required for this assignment. Research essay will be evaluated on the same scale as for the undergrads.
5. Graduate students are required to write a book review for one of the books from the list. Students should provide a comprehensive summary of the book and a critical analysis of its main argument. Book reviews will consist of 1,500 words (approximately 5 pages). Students must use footnotes for citations (any style), 1-inch margins, double-spaced pages, and any legible 12-point size font. The deadline for book reviews is November 10, 2023. Book reviews submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of 0.

List of books:

D'Anieri, P. (2023). *Ukraine and Russia*. Cambridge University Press.

Frye, T. (2022). *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*. Princeton University Press.

Reuter, J. (2017). *The origins of dominant parties: Building authoritarian institutions in post-Soviet Russia*. Cambridge University Press.

Rosenfeld, B. (2020). *The autocratic middle class: how state dependency reduces the demand for democracy (Vol. 26)*. Princeton University Press.

Sharafutdinova, G. (2020). *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*. Oxford University Press.

Smyth, R. (2020). *Elections, protest, and authoritarian regime stability: Russia 2008–2020*. Cambridge University Press.

Stoner, K. E. (2020) *Russia resurrected: Its power and purpose in a new global order*. Oxford University Press.

Stent, A. (2019) *Putin's World: Russia against the West and with the Rest*. Hachette UK.

Szakonyi, D. (2020) *Politics for Profit: Business, Elections, and Policymaking in Russia*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **Grading:**

Class participation	10 %
Discussion lead	10 %
Take-Home Quizzes (three)	10 %

Policy memos (two)	20 %
Research Essay	30 %
Book review	20 %

**Scale:**

A	95-100
A -	90-94
B +	85-89
B	80-84
B -	75-79
C +	70-74
C	65-69
D	55-59
D -	50-54
F	0-49

**Student Attendance Notice and Assignment Extension Policy:**

All enrolled students need to attend ALL seminar meetings listed on the syllabus. Any enrolled student who misses more than 1 class seminar without a valid excuse will receive a grade of F for the course. If sick, students are required to submit a valid medical note to SSH within 1 week of missing a class. Students who fall ill on/near the due dates of assignments also need to contact the professor. Extensions can only be given with proof of valid medical documentation.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students are required to ensure that the work which they submit for grading in this class is their own. Students must provide citations in the form of footnotes when referencing the works of other scholars within designated assignments. Instances of cheating and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in the student receiving a score of 0 for an assignment. All instances in which plagiarism is suspected will be referred to SSH for disciplinary committee review. Copying, rephrasing of text without citations, as well as submitting unoriginal work constitutes plagiarism.

**Class Schedule:**

WEEK	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
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<b>WEEK 1</b>	Introduction	
<b>WEEK 2</b>	The Collapse of the Soviet Union	
<b>WEEK 3</b>	Constitutional Foundations of Power	
<b>WEEK 4</b>	Yeltsin and the 1990s: Shock Therapy and Marketization	
<b>WEEK 5</b>	Consolidation of Power Under Putin	POLICY MEMO I
<b>WEEK 6</b>	Russian Federalism	
<b>WEEK 7</b>	Russian Civil Society	
<b>WEEK 8</b>	FALL BREAK	
<b>WEEK 9</b>	The Opposition	
<b>WEEK 10</b>	The Politics of Protest	POLICY MEMO II
<b>WEEK 11</b>	The Siloviki	PRESENTATIONS
<b>WEEK 12</b>	Russian Foreign Policy	PRESENTATIONS
<b>WEEK 13</b>	Russia and the Central Asia	PRESENTATIONS
<b>WEEK 14</b>	Russia, the West, and the Future of the Global Order	PRESENTATIONS
<b>WEEK 15</b>		FINAL ESSAYS

### **Class Schedule:**

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

Fish, M. S. (2018). What has Russia become?. *Comparative Politics*, 50(3), 327-346.

Pepinsky, T. B. (2019). The return of the single-country study. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 187-203.

Shleifer, A., & Treisman, D. (2005). A normal country: Russia after communism. *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 19(1), 151-174.

Stengel, R. Choosing Order Before Freedom, *Time Magazine* (December 19, 2007).

#### **Week 2: The Collapse of the Soviet Union**

Treisman, pp. 1-40.

Orlando Figes, "Who Lost the Soviet Union?" *New York Times* (January 20, 2002).

Sullivan, C. J. (2015). Conceptualizing the Collapse: Stalin, Gorbachev, and the Downfall of the USSR. *East European Quarterly*, 43(4), 243-264.

#### **Week 3: Constitutional Foundations of Power**

Danilenko, G. M. (1994). The New Russian Constitution and International Law. *American Journal of International Law*, 88(3), 451-470.

Partlett, W. (2021). Russia's 2020 Constitutional Amendments: A Comparative Analysis. *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies*, 23, 311-342.

Pomeranz, W. E. (2021). Putin's 2020 Constitutional Amendments: What Changed? What Remained the Same?. *Russian Politics*, 6(1), 6-26.



#### **Week 4: Yeltsin and the 1990s: Shock Therapy and Marketization**

Treisman, pp. 41-79, 197-239

Glinski, D., & Reddaway, P. (1999). The Ravages of "Market Bolshevism". *Journal of Democracy*, 10, 19.

Shleifer, A., & Treisman, D. (2005). A normal country: Russia after communism. *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 19(1), 151-174.

VIDEO: "Spinning Boris" (2003).

#### **Week 5: Consolidation of Power Under Putin**

Treisman, pp. 80-122.

Wilson, K. (2021). Is Vladimir Putin a strong leader?. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 37(1), 80-97.

VIDEO: "Putin's Revenge," *PBS Frontline* 36.2-3 (2017).

Frye, T. Russia's Weak Strongman, *Foreign Affairs*, April 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2021-04-01/vladimir-putin-russias-weak-strongman>

Maria Lipman's review on Frye's "Weak Strongman" <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2021-04-20/weak-strongman-limits-power-putins-russia>

#### **Week 6: Russian Federalism**

Stoner-Weiss, K. (1999). Central weakness and provincial autonomy: observations on the devolution process in Russia. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 15(1), 87-106.

Giuliano, E. (2006). Secessionism from the bottom up: Democratization, nationalism, and local accountability in the Russian transition. *World Politics*, 58(2), 276-310.

Sharafutdinova, G. (2000). Chechnya versus Tatarstan: Understanding ethnopoltics in post-communist Russia. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47(2), 13-22.

Hale, H. E. (2004). Divided we stand: Institutional sources of ethnofederal state survival and collapse. *World politics*, 56(2), 165-193.

#### **Week 7: Russian Civil Society**

Hale, H. E. (2011). The myth of mass Russian support for autocracy: The public opinion foundations of a hybrid regime. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63(8), 1357-1375.

Henderson, S. L. (2011). Civil society in Russia: state-society relations in the post-Yeltsin era. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 58(3), 11-27.

Arkhangelsky, A. "Murder in Moscow: Anna's Legacy," *Index on Censorship* 45.3 (2016): 69-74.

Khodorkovsky, M. "A Problem Much Bigger Than Putin," *New York Times* (September 12, 2017).

#### **Week 8: The Opposition**

Dollbaum, J. M., Semenov, A., & Sirotkina, E. (2018). A top-down movement with grass-roots effects? Alexei Navalny's electoral campaign. *Social Movement Studies*, 17(5), 618-625.

Gel'man, V. (2005). Political opposition in Russia: A dying species?. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 21(3), 226-246.

Gel'man, V. (2017). Political opposition in Russia: A troubled transformation. *Europe-Asia Studies*.

### **Week 9: The Politics of Protest**

Robertson, G. (2013). Protesting Putinism: The election protests of 2011-2012 in broader perspective. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 60(2), 11-23.

Lankina, T., & Tertychnaya, K. (2020). Protest in electoral autocracies: a new dataset. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 36(1), 20-36.

Semenov, A., & Popkova, E. (2023). Subnational Coercion during Aleksei Navalny's Presidential Campaign in Russia. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 1-31.

Way, L. A. (2020). Belarus uprising: How a dictator became vulnerable. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(4), 17-27.

### **Week 10: The Siloviki**

Bremmer, I., & Charap, S. (2007). The siloviki in Putin's Russia: who they are and what they want. *The Washington Quarterly*, 30(1), 83-92.

Rivera, D. W., & Rivera, S. W. (2018). The militarization of the Russian elite under Putin: What we know, what we think we know (but don't), and what we need to know. *Problems of Post-communism*, 65(4), 221-232.

Petrov, N., & Rochlitz, M. (2019). Control Over the Security Services in Periods of Political Uncertainty: A Comparative Study of Russia and China. *Russian Politics*, 4(4), 546-573.

### **Week 11: Russian Foreign Policy**

Ghia Nodia, "The Wounds of Lost Empire," *Journal of Democracy* 20.12 (2009): 34-38.

Lowell Barrington, Erik Herron, and Brian Silver, "The Motherland Is Calling: Views of Homeland among Russians in the Near Abroad," *World Politics* 55.2 (2003): 290-313.

John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* (2014): 77-89.

Karen Dawisha "Is Russia's Foreign Policy That of a Corporatist-Kleptocratic Regime?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27.4 (2011): 331-365.

Charles King, "Eurasia Letter: Moldova with a Russian Face," *Foreign Policy* 97 (1994-95): 106- 120.

D. Byman and C. King, "The Mystery of Phantom States," *The Washington Quarterly* 35.3 (2012). A. Rácz, "In Russia's Hands: Nagorno-Karabakh after the Ceasefire Agreement," *ISS* (2021).

A. Iskandaryan, "The Epoch of Regional Powers," *PONARS Eurasia Memo* 722 (2021).

Mark Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's 'New Way of War'?" *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 27.2 (2016): 282-301.

Ivan Katchanovski, "The Separatist War in Donbass: A Violent Break-Up of Ukraine?" *European Politics and Society* 17.4 (2016): 473-489.

### **Week 13: Russia and the Central Asia**

Tarr, D. G. (2016). The Eurasian economic union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and the Kyrgyz Republic: Can it succeed where its predecessor failed?. *Eastern European Economics*, 54(1), 1-22.

Sullivan, C. J. (2018). Sidestepping a quagmire: Russia, Syria, and the lessons of the soviet-afghan war. *Asian Affairs*, 49(1), 48-55.

Isaacs, R. (2020). Russia–Kazakhstan Relations and the Tokayev–Nazarbayev Tandem. *Russian Analytical Digest*, (248), 2-5.

### **Week 13: Russia, the West, and the Future of the Global Order**

Tsygankov, A. P. (2013). The Russia-NATO mistrust: Ethnophobia and the double expansion to contain “the Russian Bear”. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 46(1), 179-188.

Dimitar Bechev, D. (2015). Understanding the contest between the EU and Russia in their shared neighborhood. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62(6), 340-349.

McFaul, M. (2021). Russia's road to autocracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 32(4), 11-26.