RUSSIAN POLITICS

This course presents a broad introduction to contemporary politics and society in Russia. What was the Soviet Union, and why did democracy fail in Russia after the USSR fell apart? What kind of regime has Vladimir Putin constructed? What do we know about public opinion and the lives and values of ordinary Russians? How does the Russian economy work? How may we understand Russia’s invasion of Ukraine? What is behind Russia’s descent from relatively soft authoritarianism into hard dictatorship?

Requirements consist of three exams and attendance at all lectures and discussion sections. Students are expected to do the readings for the week in their entirety by the time of their discussion section on Wednesday. All course readings are available electronically on the bcourses site. There will be a short quiz on the readings for the week each Thursday at the beginning of lecture, with the exception of weeks 1, 6, and 11, when there will not be a quiz, and week 14, when the quiz will be on Tuesday rather than Thursday. The ten top quiz grades (and only the ten top grades) will count toward the course grade. No quizzes may be made up for any reason. The first preliminary exam is on September 29; the second preliminary exam is on November 3; and the final exam is on December 16 at 7-9 pm.

Grades will be determined on the basis of a 100-point scale. Each preliminary exam counts for 20 points; the final exam counts for 30 points; the quizzes count for 2 points each (for 20 points in total); and 10 points will be determined by attendance at lectures and attendance and participation in discussion sections. The third and final exam will be cumulative in coverage of course material.

All correspondence regarding the course, including administrative and logistical questions, should be carried out with your GSI. Students who wish to consult with Professor Fish should do so during office hours.

Use of laptop computers, cell phones, and any other communications or internet devices in lecture is prohibited. Use of such devices will result in a ten-point reduction (roughly one letter grade) in the final course grade for each infraction.

Our books for the course are:


Peter Pomerantsev, Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).

*Syllabus*

**PART I: RUSSIA IN THE 20TH CENTURY**

**Week 1 (Aug 25): Studying Russia**

Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, Act 1.

**Week 2 (Aug 30 & Sept 1): What Was the Soviet Union?**

Colton, *Russia*, ch. 3.

**Week 3 (Sept 6 & 8): Collapse, Crisis, and the Struggle for Power**

Colton, *Russia*, ch. 4.
Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, chs. 2-3.

**PART II: THE REGIME AND THE RULER**

**Week 4 (Sept 13 & 16): Forging Autocracy**

Colton, *Russia*, ch. 5.


**Week 5 (Sept 20 & 22): The Autocrat**

Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, chs. 1, 4-9.


**Week 6 (Sept 27 & 29): Putinism**


M. Steven Fish, “What Has Russia Become?,” *Comparative Politics* 50, 3 (April 2018), pp. 327-346.


**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29: FIRST PRELIMINARY EXAM (COVERS MATERIAL WEEKS 1-6)**

**Week 7 (Oct 4 & 6): How the Government Works**


Yaffa, *Between Two Fires*, ch. 1.

**PART III: ECONOMY AND SOCIETY**

**Week 8 (Oct 11 & 13): The Economy and Its Owners**


Week 9 (Oct 18 & 20): How Russians Think about and Engage in Politics

Hill and Gaddy, Mr. Putin, ch. 10.

Yaffa, Between Two Fires, prologue.


Week 10 (Oct 25 & 27): Society and the State I

Yaffa, Between Two Fires, chs. 2, 3, & 5.


Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, Act II.

Alexei Navalny’s conversation with his would-be assassin, December 14, 2020, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AeQXc182r1A.

**Week 11 (Nov 1 & 3): Society and the State II**

Yaffa, *Between Two Fires*, chs. 6-7.


**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3: SECOND PRELIMINARY EXAM (COVERS MATERIAL WEEKS 7-10)**

**PART IV: RUSSIA AND THE WORLD**

**Week 12 (Nov 8 & 10): The View from Moscow**

Angela E. Stent, *Putin’s World: Russia against the West and with the Rest* (New York: Twelve, 2019), pp. 1-43.


Anne Applebaum, “‘They’re Not Human Beings’,” *The Atlantic*, June 2022.

**Week 13 (Nov 15 & 17): The Operative in the World**

Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, chs. 11-14.


**Week 14 (Nov 22): Russia and America**


Browder, *Freezing Order* (entire).

**NOTE: QUIZ FOR THIS WEEK IS ON TUESDAY**

**Week 15 (Nov 29 & Dec 1): Reflections and Prospects**

Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, coda.

Colton, *Russia*, ch. 6.


Yaffa, *Between Two Fires*, epilogue.

Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, Act III.


**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16: FINAL EXAM (COMPREHENSIVE IN COVERAGE OF COURSE MATERIAL)**
Extra Credit: Movies, Interviews, and Documentaries

Each exam will contain short extra credit questions on the films listed below. Students can earn up to one point per preliminary exam and two points on the final exam.

Preliminary Exam 1:

One extra credit question will be offered for each of these two films:

- Kolyma – Birthplace of Our Fear (2019)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oo1WouI38rQ&t=5s

- Putin: A Russian Spy Story - Part 1 (2020)
  https://documentaryheaven.com/putin-russian-spy-story/

Preliminary Exam 2:

One extra credit question will be offered for each of these two films:

- Leviathan (2014)

- Putin: A Russian Spy Story - Part 2 (2020)
  https://documentaryheaven.com/putin-russian-spy-story/

Final Exam:

One extra credit question will be offered for each of these two films and one interview:

- Putin’s Revenge (2017)
  https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-revenge/

- Putin: A Russian Spy Story - Part 3 (2020)
  https://documentaryheaven.com/putin-russian-spy-story/

- “Yashin: Being against Putin, but Staying in Russia” (Ilya Yashin interviewed by Yuri Dud), June 16, 2022
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4wkozuN2Bs