

Russian Politics: From Lenin to Putin

GVPT 459K
Tyd 2106

Tu, Th: 11-12:15
University of Maryland
Spring 2023

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Russian Politics: From Lenin to Putin

This undergraduate seminar provides students with historical, political, and cultural analyses regarding contemporary Russian politics. It explores some of the most fascinating events in world history: the origins, dynamics, and dissolution of the Soviet Union, as well as Russia's post-communist experiment with democracy. The class discussions will be focused on such topics as: the intellectual origins of Leninism (the Russian revolutionary tradition and the problem of nihilism); Lenin's contributions (vanguard party); from Lenin to Stalin; the purges and the self-destruction of the Bolshevik Old Guard; the impact of Stalinism; post-totalitarianism and post-Stalinism; Gorbachev and the collapse of ideocratic authoritarianism; Yeltsin's revolution and its ambiguous legacies; the rise of Putin's "managed democracy"; parties and constitutionalism in contemporary Russia; the emergence of the new authoritarianism under Putin; prospects for the future: meanings of competitive authoritarianism.

The Structure of the Course:

Class readings are a crucial component of this class. I expect you to finish the assigned readings before our class meets. Participation in class discussions is one of the most important components of this class. Your grade will be based on class participation, one quiz, a take home midterm exam and a final take home exam. In addition, students can

volunteer to give short 10 minutes class presentations on a topic approved by the professor. This is optional and available to students who want to improve their grade.

Occasionally I will post a short, extra credit assignment on ELMS for anyone interested on improving their grade. The final grade reflects the overall class performance. As events unfold in the former communist countries, students will be required to read either *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* (or both) on a daily base. In addition, students are encouraged to read *East European Politics and Societies, Problems of Post-Communism, The Economist, The New York Review of Books* and *The New Republic* (pieces dealing with changes in the former communist bloc).

Course Requirements

The reading assignments are an essential component of this course; it is important that you keep up with the readings to best understand the lectures and engage in class discussion.

1. Midterm exam: 40% Between 3-5 pages. 3 assigned topics, you choose ONE topic. Normally week before Spring Break.
2. Final take home exam—45% Between 5-10 pages or slightly longer
3. Class Participation—10%
4. Quiz-5% (announced).

Policy on Excused Absences related to COVID-19

In light of the COVID-19 epidemic, self-certified notes will serve as documentation for COVID-19 related absences or missed course expectations. This means that students do not need a note signed by a doctor or other health professional for COVID-19 related absences.

In the event that students cannot complete the regular course assessments due to COVID-19 related absences, faculty can suggest alternative assignments for students to make up missing work and complete the course. According to university policy, these alternative assignments are permitted and cannot be the basis for an Arbitrary and Capricious grading claim.

Required Readings:

2. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy* (paperback)
3. Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*
4. Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*
5. *Include for next time “Opposing Forces” Plotting the New Russia (Michnik and Navalny).*

Recommended Readings:

- Aleksandr Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*
- William Taubman, *Khrushchev*
- Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Political Culture and Civil Society*
- Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*
- Archie Brown, ed, *Contemporary Russian Politics*
- Langdon and Tismaneanu, *Putin's Totalitarian Democracy*
- Mikhael Zygar, *All the Kremlin's men.*

Schedule:

Week 1 (January 26th-Jan 31)

The Russian revolutionary tradition (nihilism, anarchism, terrorism, socialism). Leninism and the Bolshevik revolutionary project. Populism and Marxism: Plekhanov and the birth of Russian Social Democracy. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 1

Week 2 (Feb 2-Feb 7)

Populism and Marxism: Plekhanov and the birth of Russian Social Democracy. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

- Tucker, Part 1

Week 3 (Feb 9 - Feb 14)

The main themes of Leninism. Marxism and Bolshevism: eschatological messianism and the Russian tradition. The Russian intelligentsia and the appeals of socialism. The political culture of Bolshevism. War communism and NEP. The sacralization of violence, cult of ideology, and mystique of the Party. "Historical grandeur" of Leninism? The Lenin cult and myth.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 2

Week 4 (Feb 16-Feb 21)

From Lenin to Stalin. Stalin and the struggle for Lenin's mantle. Left and right oppositions: Trotsky and Bukharin.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 3

Week 5 (Feb 23- Feb 28)

Stalin's victory: revolution from above, socialism in one country, the great famine. Collectivization, industrialization five-year plans, cultural revolution and the construction of "Homo Sovieticus."

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 4
- Tucker, Part 2, chapter 3

Week 6 (March 2 – March 7)

The Great Terror, permanent purge, and the Gulag. Discussion on the concept of totalitarianism. Was Stalinism inevitable? The Stalin cult and myth.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 6
- Tucker, Part 2, chapter 4

Week 7 (March 9 – March 14)

World War II and the revival of Russian nationalism. The Cold War, post-WWII anti-"cosmopolitanism" and anti-Semitism. From state consolidation to imperial expansion. Class discussion on the Soviet political mind.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 7
- Tucker, Part 2, chapter 5

Week 8 (March 16)

After Stalin: the thaw, de-Stalinization, de-radicalization and political liberalization. Leninist political culture during the Khrushchev years. Scope and limits of communist reformation. Foreign policy.: Sino-Soviet split, world communism,

peaceful coexistence. 20th and 22nd CPSU Congresses. Soviet society in the 1960s and 70s. Rise of intellectual dissent.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 8

Week 9 (March 28- March 30)

Soviet society in the 1960s and 70s. Rise of intellectual dissent. Brezhnev and the period of stagnation. Atomization, corruption, and neo-traditionalism. The political and economic monopoly of the nomenklatura.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 9

Week 10 (April 4 – April 6)

Gorbachev, Gorbachevism, and the neo-Leninist temptation: search for socialism with a human face, liberalization, and democratization. Overcoming Leninist legacies. Glasnost and perestroika: Moscow Spring and the rise of civil society. Why did Gorbachev occur and why did he fail? The power base: Gorbachev and the party intelligentsia.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapters 10

Week 11 (April 11 – April 13)

Glasnost and perestroika: Moscow Spring and the rise of civil society. Why did Gorbachev occur and why did he fail? The power base: Gorbachev and the party intelligentsia.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapters 11

Week 12 (April 18 – April 20)

The revolutions of 1989 and their impact on the USSR. The Gorbachev-Yeltsin schism and its consequences. The 1991 coup and the demise of the CPSU. The end of USSR: why did it happen? Main causes, dynamics, consequences.

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 12
- Pomerantsev, Act 1

Week 13 (April 25 – April 27)

Yeltsin's presidency, political democracy, the birth of market economy (privatization of the nomenklatura, shock therapy). The presidency and political leadership. Politics in the other former Soviet Republics (focus on Ukraine, Belarus, and Baltic states).

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 13
- Pomerantsev, Act 2

Week 14 (May 2 – May 4)

Whither Russia? From Yeltsin to Putin: the authoritarian restoration. Political parties in Russia: the communists, the party of power, nationalists. The politics of post-imperial despair: Weimar Russia? The weakness of civil society and liberalism in contemporary Russia. The making of president Putin. The Putin project, the security forces, and the oligarchs. Who is Putin: His KGB background, relations with Yeltsin, establishment of an authoritarian regime. Main features of Putinism. Putin and the Soviet legacies. Confronting the Soviet past, Stalinist nostalgias, Russian nationalism and the Orthodox Church.

Readings:

- Pomerantsev, Act 3

Week 15 (May 9 – 15)

Conclusions and Q/A