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; the revival of ideology; prospects for the future: meanings of competitive authoritarianism.

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. IMPORTANT: Please keep in mind that lectures do not duplicate the readings and students are expected to be familiar with notions and information provided by the professor in his presentations.

A) Two announced quizzes (20 %)
B) Midterm in class exam (20 %)
C) Final take home exam (50 %)
D) Class Participation (10 %)
Students are encouraged to approach the TA and discuss possible class short presentations on course-related topic. These presentations will add to the final grade.

Readings:

Required:


3. Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face* (paperback)


5. Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Revolution* (paperback)

Recommended:

--Aleksandr Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*

--William Taubman, *Khrushchev*

--Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Political Culture and Civil Society*

--Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands*

--Karen Dawisha, *Putin’s Kleptocracy*

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4 (Week 9). 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. 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. 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).

Readings:
-- Martin Malia
--David Satter


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