

GVPT459K Russian Politics from Lenin to Putin
Fall 2017
Tu, Th: 11-12:15

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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; 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:

1. Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind* (paperback)
2. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy* (paperback)
3. Masha Gessen, *The Man Without a Face* (paperback)
4. David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago and It Never Happened Anyway* (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*

1 (Weeks 1-3). 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. 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.

Readings: Martin Malia
Orlando Figes

2 (Weeks 4-6). From Lenin to Stalin. Stalin and the struggle for Lenin's mantle (left and right oppositions: Trotsky, Bukharin). 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." The Great Terror, permanent purge, and the Gulag. Discussion on the concept of totalitarianism. Was Stalinism inevitable? The Stalin cult and myth. 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.

Readings: Martin Malia
Orlando Figes
Robert Tucker

3 (Weeks 7 and 8). 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. Brezhnev and the period of stagnation. Atomization, corruption, and neo-traditionalism. The political and economic monopoly of the nomenklatura.

Readings: Martin Malia
Orlando Figes
Robert Tucker

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

5 (Weeks 10-12). 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:

--Masha Gessen

--David Satter