

Georgia Institute of Technology
School of History, Technology, and Society
HTS 3048

MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORY: PUTIN'S REGIME AND ITS ROOTS

Instructor: Prof. Nikolay Koposov

Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:05 – 4:25

D.M. Smith 207

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:30 – 3:00

Course overview:

The course starts with an analysis of the recent events in Russia and the current issues in Russian-American relationships (from the Pussy Riot case to the Snowden affair, the law against homosexuality and the crisis in Syria). These events - taken together with other measures aiming at limiting civil rights in Russia – show that Vladimir Putin's regime has entered into a new stage of its development characterized by strengthening of its authoritarian tendencies. The course gives an overview of recent Russian history (from the Communist period to the present) with a goal to explain the origins of the anti-democratic turn in Russian domestic and foreign policy since 2000. We shall examine the characteristic features of Soviet/Russian political culture, the reasons for the collapse of Communism, the promises and difficulties of the democratic reforms of the 1990s, the specificity of Russia's transition to capitalism and the formation of Vladimir Putin's regime.

Russia is a country where global trends often manifest themselves in extreme forms. We shall use the notion of exceptional/normal to account for this particularity of Russian history and explore what Russian case tells us about the prospects for democracy in the present-day world. A comparative approach will be fundamental for our discussion of Russian politics, economy, and society. We'll be systematically comparing Russia with other countries of the former Soviet bloc, as well as with the West. We shall also reflect on the other countries' experience of dealing with Russia over the course of its recent history.

Every class will be a combination of lecture and discussion. There will be no textbook. Power-points will be made available to students after lectures.

Students are required to attend classes and observe the Georgia Tech Honor Code.

Learning outcomes:

Students in this class will demonstrate:

- A knowledge of basic facts of Modern Russian history;
- The ability to describe the specificity of Russia's development and the way in which world-wide tendencies manifested themselves in Russia;
- An understanding of the ways in which long-term tendencies of historical development interact with contingencies and human agency;
- The ability to analyze the problem of continuity vs. ruptures in Russian history;
- An understanding of the specificity of Russia's culture and traditions (including business culture and political culture);
- The ability to critically assess various theoretical approaches to Modern Russian history (e.g., the theory of totalitarianism, revisionism or social history, post-revisionism);
- An understanding of Communism as a social system and the reasons for its collapse;
- An understanding of the role of the Soviet legacy in the present-day Russia;
- The ability to describe the specificity of Russia's post-communist transformations as compared with other post-communist countries.

Requirements:

Grades for this course will be based on several criteria:

Class participation (10%): make sure you do the readings before the first class of each week and come prepared for discussion; the grade will be based on frequency and quality of your comments

Midterm (30%): short essay (approximately 2500 words); chose one of the books included in the list of recommended literature (see below) and give its analysis, including responses to the following questions: What is the author's argument (single out several most important points)? What evidence the author relies upon? Which points of the author's argument look convincing for you and where you would disagree with him? Why? MIND: your essay is NOT about Russia. It is about what the author you have chosen thinks about Russia.

Final essay (60%): essay (approximately 5000 words) on a topic of your choice (approved by the instructor) related to recent Russian history. You can use books listed in the bibliography as well as other materials. The expectation is that you will read no less than 400 pages to prepare the essay.

Week 1. Introduction: Putin is back.

Pussy Riot vs. Vladimir Putin: a punk-rock song performed in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. February 21, 2012. The Putin-Medvedev tandem and the crisis of confidence in Russian politics (2010-2011). Russian elections and the protest movement (2011-2012).

Read:

- Sergey Belanovsky and Mikhail Dmitriev, *Political crisis in Russia and how it may develop*, http://csis.org/files/attachments/110330_CSR_Political_Crisis_in_Russia.pdf
- Simon Jenkins, "The West's hypocrisy over Pussy Riot is breathtaking," *Guardian*, August 21, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/21/west-hypocrisy-pussy-riot>

Week 2. A road to terror? Political repressions in Russia, 2012-13.

Recent legislation and the limitation of civil rights. Political trials. A struggle against corruption? Russian-American relationships today.

Read:

- Vladimir Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia," http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?_r=0

Week 3. An overview of Soviet history (1917-1975)

The making of the Soviet system. Stalinism: terror, war, and culture. Was the Soviet Union a totalitarian state? Stalin's successors.

Read:

- *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents*, 2nd ed., ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chapter "The Stalin Revolution," pp. 157-172 (Introduction by R.G. Suny); pp. 172-186 ("The Bolshevik Invention of Class" by Sheila Fitzpatrick); pp.198-208 ("The Urge to Struggle On," by Jochen Hellbeck).

Week 4. The crisis of the Soviet system (1975-1985).

The stagnation of the Soviet economy. The ideal image of the West and the rise of the democratic movement. National politics and nationalisms in the USSR. Was the USSR reformable?

Read:

- Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), chapter 16, "End of Socialism," pp. 461-99;
- Stephen F. Cohen, *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), chapter 4 "Was the Soviet System Reformable?" pp. 85-111.

Week 5. Perestroika (1985 – 1991).

Mikhail Gorbachev: how and why did the Soviet leader start the perestroika? "Which road leads to the Temple?" The critique of Stalinism and the collapse of Soviet ideology. Towards the end of the Cold War. "New thinking" in foreign policy. Gorbachev's politics of culture.

Read:

- Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917 – 1991* (New York: The Free Press), 1994, ch. 11, “Reform of Communism II: Gorbachev and Perestroika, 1982-1988,” pp. 405-443;
- Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1998, chapter 20, “Interregnum and the Road to Revolution,” pp. 449-468.

Week 6. Perestroika (continued). 1991: The decisive year.

Reforming a socialist economy. The origins of a “wild capitalism” and social changes in Russia in the late 1980s. Could the USSR survive? National movements and national conflicts under Gorbachev. The August Putsch (August 19-21, 1991) and the end of the Soviet regime. The dissolution of the Soviet Union (August – December 1991).

Read:

- Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1998, chapter 21, “The End of the Soviet Union,” pp. 469-484.

Week 7. The market reforms and the struggle for power (January 1992 – December 1993).

Russian liberals: a space of experience and a horizon of expectations. The shock therapy. The constitutional crisis. The struggle between the president and the Parliament. The October coup, 1993.

Read:

- Anders Åslund, *How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2007, chapter 2, “Shock Therapy versus Gradualism,” pp. 29-56.

Week 8. Power, society and culture in Yeltsin’s Russia.

Boris Yeltsin: a man in power. The Russian constitution of 1993. Privatization. The “New Russians” and the “Old Russians.” Everyday life as a post-modern experience: Russian society as seen by writers and cineastes. In search of a “national idea.” Russia, the “near-abroad” (former socialist countries), and the West in the 1990s. A comparative perspective on the market reforms.

Read:

- The Constitution of Russian Federation, <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>
- Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2002), chapter 8 “Searching for a New Russian Idea,” pp. 158-172.

Week 9. The Chechen war and the crisis of Yeltsin’s regime (December 1994 – June 1996).

Chechnya on the eve of war. The first Chechen war (December 1994 – September 1996). A temptation of dictatorship (December 1995 – March 1996). The oligarchs and the triumph of democracy (March – July 1996).

Read:

- *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder*, ed. by Moshe Gammer (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), chapter 7, “Ideology and conflict: Chechen political nationalism prior to, and during, ten years of war,” by Ekaterina Sokirianskaya, p. 102-138;
- Cameron Ross, *Russian Politics under Putin* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), Mike Bowker, “Conflict in Chechnya,” pp. 255-268.

Week 10. Yeltsin’s hard choice: liberal reformers or secret services? (July 1996 - May 1999).

The young reformers (July 1996 – March 1998). The default (March – August 1998). A communist revenge? (September 1998 – May 1999). Russia and the Kosovo conflict (March – June 1999). A new confrontation with the West?

Read:

- David M. Kotz and Fred Weir, *Russia’s Path from Gorbachev to Putin: The Demise of the Soviet System and the New Russia* (London, New York: Routledge), 2007, chapter 13, “Depression, Financial Crisis and Recovery,” pp. 237-258;

Week 11. Putin comes to power (May 1999 – March 2000).

Who are you, Mr. Putin? Putin’s career to 1999. Yeltsin and Putin. Operation “Successor” (May 1999 – March 2000). The second Chechen war (August 1999 – March 2000). Putin’s team.

Read:

- *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents*, 2nd ed., ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Vladimir Putin, “The First person,” pp. 635-49;
- Daniel Triesman, *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gornachev to Putin* (New York, London: Free Press), chapter 3 “Unreasonable Doubt,” pp. 80-122;

Week 12. The regime in making (2000 – 2005).

The organization of power. The age of political technology: Russian media and public opinion. The oligarchs go to London... or to jail. The Khodorkovsky affair (2003). The rehabilitation of Stalin and the cult of the Second World War. The concept of “sovereign democracy.”

Read:

- Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia’s Choice*, 2nd ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), chapter 3 “Putin’s Path,” pp. 37-69.

Week 13. Economy and society in Russia, 2001-2012.

Gas, oil and market economy in Russia. The economic crisis of 2008. A neo-feudal society? Putin and the middle class: friends or enemies? The specificity of Russian capitalism.

Read:

- Thomas F. Remington, *The Politics of Inequality in Russia* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter 2, "Employment, Earnings, and Welfare in the Russian Transition," pp. 35-76.

Week 14. Russian foreign policy, 2001-2013

A country without friends? Russia's neo-imperial temptations and post-colonial failures. Russia in the post-Soviet space. Russia and the West. Russia and the US.

Read:

- Stephen K. Wegren and Dale Roy Herspring, *After Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Rowman and Littlefield), 2010, chapter 10, "Russian Foreign Policies," by Andrei P. Tsygankov, pp. 223-242;

Week 15. Why Putin?

A comparative perspective on Russian reforms. Russian reforms in the global context: Neo-liberalism and democracy. Were (are) there other possible scenarios for Russia?

Read:

- M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press), 2005, chapter 8 "Can Democracy Get Back on Track?" pp. 246-271;
- Anders Åslund, *Russia's Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reforms Succeeded and Democracy Failed* (Washington D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007), Conclusion, pp. 277-307.

Suggested reading

Here are some more books in addition to those from which readings for classes are taken:

A competent journalistic history of the USSR and Russia, from 1953 to 1995, written by a former American Moscow correspondent for the Associated Press and other agencies, who worked in Russia under Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and Yeltsin:

- Fred Coleman, *The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Forty Years That Shook the World, From Stalin to Yeltsin* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1996).

Memoires of Soviet/Russian leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin

- Mikhail Gorbachev, *On My Country and the World*, translated from Russian by George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000);

- Boris Yelstin, *Midnight diaries*, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000).

An important book on Russian nationalism:

- Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998).

A classical, very detailed account of perestroika:

- David Lane, *Soviet Society under Perestroika*, completely revised edition (London, New York: Routledge, 1992).

A powerful, radically leftist stand on the “new Russian capitalism,” by an influential Russian political scientist and opinion maker:

- Boris Kagarlitsky, *Russia under Yeltsin and Putin: Neo-liberal autocracy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

Two extremely negative accounts of Putin’s rule, by Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya (who was murdered in 2007, right on Putin’s birthday) and by a long-time Eastern European correspondent for *The Economist*, Edward Lucas:

- Anna Politkovskaya, *Putin’s Russia*, translated from the Russian by Arch Tait (London: Harvill, 2004);
- Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces both Russia and the West* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

A pro-Putin account of present-day Russia by a right-wing German journalist and historian, typical of European, especially German, conservative opinion:

- Michael Stuermer, *Putin and the Rise of Russia* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2009).

For a comparison with other Eastern European societies (in addition to Anders Åslund, see above)

- *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe*, ed. by John Higley, Jan Pakulski and Włodzimierz Wesolowski (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

Books on various aspects of post-Soviet history:

- George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002);
- Simon Clarke, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007);
- Terry Cox, *From Perestroika to Privatisation: The Politics of Property Change in Russian Society, 1985-1991* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996);
- Herbert J. Ellisson, *Boris Yeltsin and Russia’s Democratic Transformation* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2006);
- Julie Fodor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition, from Lenin to Putin* (London, New York, 2011);
- David E. Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (Oxford: Public Affairs, 2002);

- Allen C. Lynch, *How Russia Is Not Ruled: Reflections of Russian Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005);
- *Politics and the Ruling Groups in Putin's Russia*, ed. by Stephen White (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008);
- Mark Sandle, *Gorbachev: Man of the Twentieth Century?* (London: Hodder education, 2008);
- Brian D. Taylor, *State building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).