

Political Science 273
The Politics of Russia
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Russian politics in 2009, despite the passing of almost two decades since the collapse of communism, remains in some turbulence. During the last years of the Soviet period, under Gorbachev, Soviet adherence to a political system characterized by Marxist-Leninist dictatorship and an economic system characterized by a command economy was replaced by a commitment to glasnost, perestroika and democratization. One unintended component of the changes was increasing articulation of nationalist aspirations among the many "nations" of the U.S.S.R, a dynamic which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its replacement by 15 independent states. Opposition to all of these developments grew, both among committed communists and supporters of more basic reform. An attempted coup against Gorbachev during the summer of 1991 failed and, as a consequence, led to a hastening of the process of reform: the collapse of the Union, the (temporary) destruction of the Communist Party, and the (temporary) triumph in Russia of "democrats" and free marketeers. Resistance by the post-communist legislature to the Yeltsin government's reforms led in the fall of 1993 to an unconstitutional dissolution of the legislature, and then to a brief armed struggle between its supporters and the Yeltsin government, supported by the army. The triumph of the reformers was followed by efforts to legitimize their rule: a referendum ratifying a new constitution, one with significantly increased presidential powers and significantly reduced legislative ones and new legislative elections, in which anti-reform forces, however, won more seats than pro-reform legislators. Subsequently, opposition to the government's economic program, and to its attempt to hold Chechnya in the Russian Federation by force, contributed to the victory of anti-government parties in the December, 1995 parliamentary elections. The Communists were, for a time, the largest party in the legislature.

In presidential elections in 1996, however, to everyone's surprise, Yeltsin won re-election. As the new constitution grants disproportionate

power to the president, the Yeltsin administration continued economic reforms. Ultimately, that push proved to be the most powerful of the many forces unleashed during the Gorbachev era. At the end of 1999, Yeltsin resigned, with Vladimir Putin, his Prime Minister, assuming power as his constitutional successor. Putin then won the presidential election of March 2000 and handily won re-election in 2004. The 1993 Constitution limits President to two successive terms and, despite speculation that he would make some move to abrogate that limit, in 2008 he anointed a successor who, in turn, named him Prime Minister. Thus, many assume, it is Prime Minister Putin, rather than President Medvedev, who is the real power in Russia. Moreover, there is speculation that Putin will again seek the presidency in 2112.

Putin describes himself as a reformer, committed to a full realization of market capitalism and what he calls “managed democracy.” His administration moved to transform the command economy to a market one. While this effort initially had serious negative consequences, during the last few years the Russian economy has boomed. Increasing Russian prosperity, is largely attributable, however, to both Russia’s export of oil and high world oil prices.

Although many Russian citizens remain mired in poverty, a class of newly rich Russians has emerged, there is a growing middle class, and most Russians perceive the economy in positive terms. Although these and other changes are perceived by citizens as positive, a dramatic rise in corruption and crime are not.

While his economic programs have been, to some degree, successful, most scholars regard his policies as moving Russian politics away from democracy and back toward authoritarianism. Increasing government control of mass media, increasing centralization of power in Moscow at the expense of the regions and republics, and the centralization of power in the presidency all lead observers to question the democratic character of the country.

During the course of the semester we will examine the Soviet roots of the present political system, the era of reform under Gorbachev, and the chaotic Russian politics of the 1990s. However, most emphasis will be placed on the Putin era. We will examine the politics of Putin, the man and the president. We will look at the political elites surrounding him, at mass attitudes and behavior, and at the role of civil society in Russian politics. We will also study various policies of the government during this period.

In our study of Russian political phenomena, the structure of the semester is designed to reflect as accurately as possible the unsettled state of Russian politics. We will do this through structured student participation in debates as well as through class discussion. Active

participation will be an important component of the class and will be rewarded in the final grade.

Books to Buy

- Dale R. Herspring, Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect Future Uncertain, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005
- Peter Kenez, History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End, New York, Cambridge, 2006
- Richard Sakwa, Putin: Russia's Choice, New York, Routledge, 2008
- Stephen White, Zvi Gitelman and Richard Sakwa, Developments in Russian Politics, Durham, Duke University Press, 2005
- The New York Times

Other Readings

- Ian Bremmer and Samule Charap, "The *Siloviki* in Putin's Russia: Who They Are and What They Want," The Washington Quarterly, 30;1, 2006, 83-92
- Elena Chebankova, "The Unintended Consequences of Gubernatorial Appointments in Russia, 2005-2006," Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 22:4, Dec. 2006, 457-84
- Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, Are Russians Undemocratic? Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 20, 2001
- J. Paul Goode, "The Puzzle of Putin's Gubernatorial Appointments," Europe-Asia Studies, 59:3, May, 2007, 365-99
- Robert D. Grey, "The Russian People and the Future of Democracy: Attitudes, Behaviors and Opportunities," unpublished manuscript
- Henry E. Hale, "What Makes Dominant Parties Dominant in Hybrid Regimes? The Unlikely Importance of Ideas in the Case of United Russia," Paper Prepared for Presentation at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association
- Henry E. Hale, Michael McFaul, and Timothy J. Colton, "Putin and the 'Delegative Democracy' Trap: Evidence from Russia's 2003-04 Elections," Post-Soviet Affairs, 20:4, 2004, 285-319
- Olga Kryshantovskaya and Stephen White, "Inside the Putin Court: A Research Note," Europe-Asia Studies, 57:7, November 2005, 1065-75
- Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "The Myth of the Authoritarian Model," Foreign Affairs, 87:1, Jan/Feb 2008, 68-84

- Sharon Werning Rivera and David W. Rivera, "The Russian Elite under Putin: Militocratic or Bourgeois?," Post-Soviet Affairs, 22:2, 2006, 125-44
- Richard Rose, Democratization Backwards: The Problem of Third Wave Democracies, British Journal of Political Science, 31, 2001, 331-54
- Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, "Russia: Authoritarianism without Authority," Journal of Democracy, 17:1, Jan. 2006, 104-18
- Daniel Treisman, "Putin's *Silovarchs*," Orbis, 51:1, Winter 2007, 141-53
- Stephen White, "Russians and their Party Systems," Demokratizatsiya, 14:1, Winter 2006, 7-22

Writing Assignments

The format of the course is designed to encourage participation. Despite the relatively large size of the class, discussion will be emphasized. In addition, there will be four debates during the semester, with each student participating in one of them, and producing a paper based on his/her presentation. Finally, there will be both a mid-sem (due Oct. 15) and a final take-home examination in this course. Grades will be based on the papers, active participation in discussion and debate, and the exams.

Reading Assignments- Date by which the assigned reading is to be done.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Aug. 27 - Introduction
- Sept. 1 - Kenez, Chs. 1-3
- Sept. 3 - No Class
- Sept. 8 - Kenez, Chs. 4-6
- Sept. 10 - Kenez, Chs. 5-6
- Sept. 15 - Kenez, Chs. 7-10
- Sept. 17 - Kenez, Chs. 11-12
- Sept. 22 - Sakwa, Chs. 1-3
- Sept. 24 - Herspring, Ch. 1; White, Ch. 1
- Sept. 29 - Debate 1 - The USSR'S Totalitarianism was built into Marxism-Leninism

THE NEW STATE: WHAT'S THE NATION?

Oct. 1 - Sakwa, Ch. 10

RUSSIAN DEMOCRACY?

Oct. 6 - Herspring Ch.2; White, Ch.14; Sakwa, Chs. 19-20

Oct. 8 - Hale et al; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss; Rose; Stoner-Weiss

Oct. 13 - Debate 2 - Russia is a victim of the oil curse.

Oct. 15 - Mid-sem Due

MIDSEM BREAK

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Oct. 27 - Sakwa, Ch.4; White, Chs. 2-3; Sakwa, Ch. 6

Oct. 29 - Sakwa, Ch. 9; White, Ch. 8; Herspring, Ch. 3

Nov. 3 - Kryshstanovskaya and White, Treisman: Bremer and Charup; Rivera and Rivera; Herspring, Ch. 9

PARTIES AND ELECTIONS

Nov. 5 - Hale; White, "Russians and Their Party Systems; White, Ch. 5

Nov. 10 - Sakwa, Ch. 7-8; White, Ch. 4

THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE AND POLITICS

Nov. 12 - White, Ch. 6; Sakwa, Ch. 14

Nov. 17 - Colton and McFaul; Grey

THE CENTER AND THE REGIONS

Nov. 19 - Sakwa, Chs. 11-12; Herspring, Chs. 11-12

Nov. 24 - White, Chs. 9-10; Chebankova; Goode

Nov. 26 - Debate 3 - Parties are meaningful actors in Russian politics

Dec. 1 - Debate 4 – The Putin Reforms Have Successfully
Restored Central Control

DOMESTIC POLICIES: The Economy

Dec. 3 - White, Ch. 11; Herspring, Ch. 7; Sakwa, Ch. 13

FOREIGN POLICY

Dec. 8 - White, Ch. 13; Herspring, Ch. 13; Sakwa, Ch.
16

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Dec. 10 - Herspring, Ch. 14