

Politics and law in Russia today

(3 ECTS credits; November-December 2014)

Ivan Grigoriev

Table of Contents

I Organization of the course.....	1
Goal of the course.....	1
Tasks of the course.....	2
Methodological novelty of the course.....	3
Course contribution to the qualifications obtained.....	3
II Course contents.....	4
Novelty of the course as compared to other similar courses taught in Russia and abroad	4
Subjects covered.....	5
III Course outline.....	5
1 Introduction to the course. Brief overview of Russian political history (1990-2010s).....	5
2 “Slugs, snakes and puppy-dogs' tails”: What is Russian politics made of? Part 1: Presidentialism.....	6
3 Parties, media and opposition. Did they all fall victims to the president?.....	6
4 What else is Russian politics made of? Part 2: Federalism.....	7
5 So how strong is the state? Corruption, bureaucracy and state building in Russia.....	7
6 What state weakness tells us about institutions and the rule of law?.....	8
7 Business and state in Russia. Oil and resource curse. Oligarchs.....	8
8 Can society strike back? Protests and color revolutions.....	9
9 Societal, economic and political sources of autocratic resilience in Russia. A normal country?.....	9
IV Assessment policies.....	10
V Literature.....	10

I Organization of the course

Goal of the course

This is a broad introductory course to Russian politics and law, but it gives a good general understanding of how Russia really works. The course deals with the cursed questions of Russian politics: Why do Russians support autocracy? (Or do they?) Is it good Russia is a presidential republic? What happened to Russian federalism? What about its opposition? Who were those people in the streets in 2011-2012, and what did they want? Why does Russia always support the bad guys internationally? Are Russian courts as bad as they are told, and why? Did the 1990s reforms fail or succeed? Why do they turn the hot water off at summer? Are oligarchs still politically mighty? How much corruption is there and is it bad for development? In general, what's wrong with Russia? Is it the history? Is it the climate? Is it spoiled by its oil wealth? Maybe, is it in fact a completely normal country?

Much of the course evolves around issues better understood in comparison to other countries. Inevitably, this would lead us to talk about how come Ukraine be so revolutionary and Russia so calm, is state much stronger in Russia than in Tajikistan, and how much of the Soviet legacy is there prevailing in Russia as compared to, say, Estonia? We shall also discuss local politics and compare Bashkirian political machine to Daley's Chicago, and Russian mafia to their Sicilian counterparts.

The course shall constantly bring us back on slippery ground of how Russian politics interacts with Russian society and economy, but by its end students will get a firm grasp of how this triangle works. To achieve that, the course offers a reasonably vast reading of scholarly articles seasoned with ongoing political commentary and media reports, with occasional field sorties into local party offices, courts and opposition camps. The course also focuses on contemporary Russian politics, which means late Soviet politics and the 1990s are only covered inasmuch as they served a precursor to the country one might call Putin's Russia. There are no prerequisites for the course, though some prior training in social sciences would make it a more rewarding enterprise.

Tasks of the course

The course revolves around four major issues in Russian politics: super-presidentialism, regionalisation, state weakness and weak political institutions, and its resource wealth. The tasks of the course are therefore covering these four components. The three former institutional characteristics are taken to be more stable and to produce stronger legacies traced back to the late Soviet times and the 1990s. The latter, being primarily the naughts' feature, enters analysis by the midterm.

The course kicks off with a very brief crash introduction into Russian political history that aims at providing students with reference points for the rest of the course. It further moves on to discover the two major institutional features of Russian politics, namely, its presidentialism and regionalism. Presidentialism is analysed in its connection to the weak legislature (inherent in the vertical separation of powers). Then we move on to the regional dimension of Russian politics and its "federalism by default", and see how it plays out depending on the characteristics of political regime in the federal center.

Another important feature of Russian politics is state weakness. We take a more Weberian approach to examine the state strength through its bureaucracy. We analyse how capable Russian state is of conducting reforms. Another application of Russian stateness is through its relation to business interests.

Finally, we extend our talk of the business-state relationship to take a closer look at one particular feature of this relationship, namely, of the resource dependency or the resource curse. Whether it is a curse is a worthy question in itself. We also find out the effects of the

resource wealth on Russian politics, policies and society.

All of these features seem to reinforce the existent regime. Is there any room for change? We analyse the 2011-2012 protests and put them against the more general background of regime instability in the neighboring countries in the 2000s (the color revolutions) to find out what were the regimes' responses to the new societal challenges and why those challenges failed.

In a nutshell, the tasks of the course are:

- covering all major features of Russian politics as we observe it today, that is federalism, presidentialism, state weakness and resource curse;
- putting those in chronological perspective and relation to each other;
- referring this features of Russian politics to some of the most important and salient events in modern-day politics;
- introducing students to the major trends in political research on Russia;
- giving students a point of reference to do some research of their own, including the literature research and working with the primary sources;
- internationalising the study process on campus by having foreign students in the class along with Russian students, putting them in teamwork projects together, etc.

Methodological novelty of the course

One novelty employed in the course is its interactive structure. Students are loaded with literature for each class, and reading and reviewing this literature (including, in writing for the reaction paper students submit as part of the course) is made part of the final grade. This should encourage students to talk more. The course is taught on political science and sociology departments for senior-year students, so language requirements should not be an issue. Besides, this is an optional course, which drives out the students who are not completely comfortable using English. There are team projects introduced into the course, such as following the genealogies of political parties present on stage today. **Importantly, the course aims to teach and, in fact, teaches a mixed group of students from different study programs, including foreigners, which makes it comply with the priority requirement set out in the call.**

Course contribution to the qualifications obtained

The course aims at supplying students with all the necessary mental structures to think of modern Russian politics systematically. It also does so with a view of making them practice do that in English, which should inevitably be the case for those among them who will proceed with a scholarly career. The course also introduces an essay (a reaction paper) written in English, which is again a rare yet useful practice for those who wish to enter MA

programs abroad after graduation.

II Course contents

Novelty of the course as compared to other similar courses taught in Russia and abroad

A course on Russian politics is inevitable in about any political science curriculum in Russia, for obvious reasons. There are many such courses therefore taught across the country, and quite some abroad. For Russia, the traditional approach would be to build a course historically, often starting with Perestroika and then moving forward chronologically. Basically, this would make it a course in modern history of Russia, which is consistent with the way the textbooks on Russian politics are written (see e.g. the popular book by Sogrin). Some authors make an additional effort to problematize their courses by introducing an aspect of generalization. One such influential course has been taught by Vladimir Gel'man in the European university at St.Petersburg for more than 15 years now (http://old.eu.spb.ru/socio/courses/s_p7.htm), and it served as basis for the course still taught in HSE in St.Petersburg (<http://www.hse.ru/edu/courses/130715435.html>). This is a longer course though, which allows for introducing topics covering the 1990s history as well. This would be the ambition of my course, too, would it not be a mere 108-hours course. In case of extension in the future I would certainly opt for a broader time frame for the course. Yet, this also means there is a temptation to build the course chronologically again, which is evident in how it first covers the branches of government (obviously more important for the 1990s), then some specific subjects like business-state relations (with Yukos affair featuring prominently in it). This is also inherent in some of the courses in Russian politics taught abroad (e.g. see this course http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/political-science/17-57j-soviet-politics-and-society-1917-1991-spring-2003/syllabus/MIT21H_467Js03_sylls11.pdf).

With this course, I took a slightly different perspective from the outset. The course was initially proposed as part of the Informal Russia programme (<http://spb.hse.ru/international/informalrus>) and is geared towards giving an intense yet concise overview of modern-day Russian politics to foreign senior students arriving to St.Petersburg and coming from various disciplines. The course is thus problematized from the outset and deals with the students' interest in modern-day Russia, that is Russia roughly from mid-2000s on, with the previous history only given inasmuch as necessary for the topics covered.

Subjects covered

no	Subject	Hours (total)	Class hours		Self-study
			Lectures	Seminars	
1	Introduction to the course. Brief overview of Russian political history (1990s-2010s)	12	2	2	0
2	What is Russian politics made of? Presidentialism	12	2	2	8
3	Parties, media and opposition	12	2	2	8
4	Spiders in the box. Can federalism be a check on the all-mighty president?	12	2	2	8
5	Corruption, bureaucracy and state building	12	2	2	8
6	Institutions and the rule of law in Russia. Law and courts	12	2	2	8
7	Business and state in Russia. Oil and resource curse. Oligarchs	12	2	2	8
8	Protests and color revolutions	12	2	2	8
9	Societal, economic and political sources of autocratic resilience in Russia. A normal country?	12	2	2	8
Total		108	18	18	72

All of the course (lectures and reading groups) is taught by the sole instructor (Ivan Grigoriev).

III Course outline

1 Introduction to the course. Brief overview of Russian political history (1990-2010s)

Perestroika: why did it fail, or did it? August putsch and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Early Russian super-parliamentarism, Yeltsin's rule by decree and October 1993 stand-off. Presidential elections 1996 and the rise of oligarchs. "Who is mister Putin?" Popular and unpopular reforms of the first and second Putin administrations. Putin's political reforms and return to authoritarianism. Medvedev and the economic crisis in Russia. "The Return of the King", "stolen elections" and 2011-2012 protests.

Puzzle of Russian political trajectory: struggle between president and legislature in the 1990s, with regions idle. Building power vertical in 2000s and embedding regional political machines.

(4 hours)

2 "Slugs, snakes and puppy-dogs' tails": What is Russian politics made of? Part 1: Presidentialism

First electoral cycle and the birth trauma of Russian politics. The 1992-1993 stallmate and the new Constitution. How big a role does president have in Russia?

Presidentialism and government instability in late 1990s. Economic crisis and the Primakov left-wing government. 1999 impeachment attempt.

(4 hours)

Juan J. Linz. 1992. "The Perils of Presidentialism" in Arend Lijphart, ed., *Parliamentary Versus Presidential Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 119-27.

Remington, Thomas. 2008. "Patronage and the Party of Power: President–Parliament Relations Under Vladimir Putin." *Europe-Asia Studies* 60 (6): 959–87. doi:10.1080/09668130802161215.

Fish, M Steven. 2005. *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 7, pp. 193-245.

3 Parties, media and opposition. Did they all fall victims to the president?

Political parties in Russia. Where do they come from? Fate of the CPSU and the new communist party.

What role did media play in Russian politics in the late 1990s? Oligarchs and the television.

Visit to a local party office; to a regional MP.

(4 hours)

Goloso, Grigorii. 2004. *Political Parties in the Regions of Russia: Democracy Unclaimed*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. Ch. 2-3, pp. 19-56.

Gel'man, Vladimir. 2005. "Political Opposition in Russia: A Dying Species?" *Post-Soviet*

Affairs 21 (3): 226–46. doi:10.2747/1060-586X.21.3.226.

Lipman, Masha, and Michael McFaul. 2005. "Putin and the Media." In *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, edited by Dale R. Herspring, 55–74. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Enikolopov, Ruben, Maria Petrova, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2011. "Media and Political Persuasion: Evidence from Russia." *The American Economic Review* 101 (7): 3253–85.

4 What else is Russian politics made of? Part 2: Federalism

"Federalism by default": Soviet matryoshka federalism and chocolate-bar break-up after Soviet collapse. The all-mighty governors and gubernatorial elections in 1990s. Regional machines and the Fatherland – All Russia party in 1999.

Adverse effects of federalism on party formation. Defederalization of Russia and building governors into the power vertical.

(4 hours)

Golosov, Grigorii. 2004. *Political Parties in the Regions of Russia: Democracy Unclaimed*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. Ch. 3, pp. 57-90.

Kahn, Jeffrey. 2002. *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 8, pp. 234-278.

Golosov, Grigorii V. 2011. "The Regional Roots of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (4): 623–39. doi:10.1080/09668136.2011.566427.

Taylor, Brian D. 2011. *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion After Communism*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 4, pp. 112-155.

5 So how strong is the state? Corruption, bureaucracy and state building in Russia

Russia's surprisingly weak state. What is state weakness? State autonomy, state capacity and corruption. Is Russian state stronger under Putin than under Yeltsin?

Descending to the local level and seeking societal explanations. *Blat*. Political machines.

(4 hours)

Evans, Peter, and James E Rauch. 1999. "Bureaucracy and Growth: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effects of 'Weberian' State Structures on Economic Growth." *American Sociological Review*, 748–65.

Volkov, Vadim. 1999. "Violent Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51 (5): 741–54.

Jowitt, Ken. 1983. "Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist

Regime.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 35 (3): 275–97.

Libman, Alexander, and Anastassia Obydenkova. Forthcoming. CPSU Legacies and Regional Democracy in Contemporary Russia. *Political Studies*.

Libman, Alexander, and Anastassia Obydenkova. 2013. “Communism or Communists? Soviet Legacies and Corruption in Transition Economies.” *Economics Letters* 119 (1): 101–3. doi:10.1016/j.econlet.2013.02.003.

6 What state weakness tells us about institutions and the rule of law?

Formal and informal institutions in Russian politics. Are courts another victim of the regime? How is law made in Russia?

Visit to the Constitutional court.

(4 hours)

Ledeneva, Alena V. 1998. *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 4, pp. 104-138.

Gel’man, Vladimir. 2004. “The Unrule of Law in the Making: The Politics of Informal Institution Building in Russia.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 (7): 1021–40. doi:10.1080/1465342042000294347.

Solomon, Peter H. 2008. “Judicial Power in Authoritarian States: The Russian Experience.” In *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*, edited by Tom Ginsburg and Tamir Moustafa, 261. Cambridge University Press.

Gel’man, Vladimir. 2012. “Subversive Institutions, Informal Governance, and Contemporary Russian Politics.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (3–4): 295–303. doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.07.005.

7 Business and state in Russia. Oil and resource curse. Oligarchs

Is Russia swinging between state-capture and business-capture? How big is the Big Oil in Russian politics?

What is resource curse and why is it a curse?

(4 hours)

Orttung, Robert W. 2004. “Business and Politics in the Russian Regions.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 51 (2): 48–60.

Volkov, Vadim. 2008. “Standard Oil and Yukos in the Context of Early Capitalism in the United States and Russia.”

Yakovlev, Andrei. 2006. “The Evolution of Business – State Interaction in Russia: From State Capture to Business Capture?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (7): 1033–56.

doi:10.1080/09668130600926256.

Gel'man, Vladimir. 2010. "The Logic of Crony Capitalism: Big Oil, Big Politics, and Big Business in Russia." In *Resource Curse and Post-Soviet Eurasia: Oil, Gas, and Modernization*, edited by Otar Marganiya and Vladimir Gel'man. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

8 Can society strike back? Protests and color revolutions

Who are the Russian protesters and what do they want? Why revolutions happen elsewhere but not in Russia?

Visit to a local environmentalist office.

(4 hours)

Robertson, Graeme B. 2009. "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia." *Slavic Review*, 528–47.

Finkel, Evgeny, and Yitzhak M. Brudny. 2012. "No More Colour! Authoritarian Regimes and Colour Revolutions in Eurasia." *Democratization* 19 (1): 1–14. doi:10.1080/13510347.2012.641298.

Koesel, Karrie J, and Valerie J Bunce. 2012. "Putin, Popular Protests, and Political Trajectories in Russia: A Comparative Perspective." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28 (4): 403–23.

9 Societal, economic and political sources of autocratic resilience in Russia. A normal country?

Do Russians support their political regime? What are the major correlates of this support? Is it economy? Is it stability? Is it law and order? Are Russians autocratic by nature?

What does regime do to stay? How popular are regime policies?

(4 hours)

Rose, Richard, William Mishler, and Neil Munro. 2011. *Popular Support for an Undemocratic Regime: The Changing Views of Russians*. Cambridge University Press.

Shleifer, Andrei. 2005. *A Normal Country: Russia after Communism*. Harvard University Press.

Taylor, Brian D. 2011. *State Building in Putin-S Russia: Policing and Coercion After Communism*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 8, pp. 284-322.

Ambrosio, Thomas. 2009. *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union*. Ashgate Publishing. Ch. 4, pp. 45-68.

IV Assessment policies

Every class starts with a brief (1 hour long) overview of the subject by the instructor. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of the literature assigned for the class, with occasional team project presentations. The students' work in class during seminars amounts to **40%** of the final grade. This mostly deals with the instructor's assessment of their reading. The other **40%** of the grade come from a reaction paper students write covering the reading assignment for one class of their choice (which they submit to the instructor after the first class where they get familiar with the course requirements and can ask some further questions to ascertain their points of interest for the course). The reaction paper is a 1000 words long essay where a student reviews the literature assigned for the class, gives her opinion and some critiques on it. If the literature assigned is reviewed properly, drawing on some additional literature is an advantage (but not necessarily so if the assignment literature is reviewed superficially). Finally, there is also a team project which amounts to **20%** of the final grade. With an aggregate grade of 6 or higher a student is excused from taking the exam. The exam is a written answer to one of the broad questions covered in the course. The exam lasts 2 hours and adds up to the final grade as 35% to 65%.

V Literature

Ambrosio, Thomas. 2009. *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union*. Ashgate Publishing.

Colgan, Jeff D. 2010. "Oil and Revolutionary Governments: Fuel for International Conflict." *International Organization* 64 (04): 661–94. doi:10.1017/S002081831000024X.

Finkel, Evgeny, and Yitzhak M. Brudny. 2012. "No More Colour! Authoritarian Regimes and Colour Revolutions in Eurasia." *Democratization* 19 (1): 1–14. doi:10.1080/13510347.2012.641298.

Fish, M Steven. 2005. *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Gel'man, Vladimir. 2004. "The Unrule of Law in the Making: The Politics of Informal Institution Building in Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 (7): 1021–40. doi:10.1080/1465342042000294347.

Goloso, Grigorii. 2004. *Political Parties in the Regions of Russia: Democracy Unclaimed*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Hale, Henry E. 2006. *Why Not Parties in Russia?: Democracy, Federalism, and the State*. Cambridge University Press.

Kahn, Jeffrey. 2002. *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia*. Oxford

University Press.

Koesel, Karrie J, and Valerie J Bunce. 2012. "Putin, Popular Protests, and Political Trajectories in Russia: A Comparative Perspective." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28 (4): 403–23.

Ledeneva, Alena V. 1998. *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Vol. 102. Cambridge University Press.

Libman, Alexander, and Anastassia Obydenkova. 2013. "Communism or Communists? Soviet Legacies and Corruption in Transition Economies." *Economics Letters* 119 (1): 101–3. doi:10.1016/j.econlet.2013.02.003.

———. 2014. "Governance of Commons in a Large Nondemocratic Country: The Case of Forestry in the Russian Federation." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 44 (2): 298–323. doi:10.1093/publius/pjt065.

McFaul, Michael, and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss. 2008. "The Myth of the Authoritarian Model: How Putin's Crackdown Holds Russia Back." *Foreign Affairs* 87 (1): 68–84.

Orttung, Robert W. 2004. "Business and Politics in the Russian Regions." *Problems of Post-Communism* 51 (2): 48–60.

Remington, Thomas. 2008. "Patronage and the Party of Power: President–Parliament Relations Under Vladimir Putin." *Europe-Asia Studies* 60 (6): 959–87. doi:10.1080/09668130802161215.

Remington, Thomas F. 2000. "The Evolution of Executive-Legislative Relations in Russia since 1993." *Slavic Review*, 499–520.

Robertson, Graeme B. 2009. "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia." *Slavic Review*, 528–47.

Rose, Richard, William Mishler, and Neil Munro. 2011. *Popular Support for an Undemocratic Regime: The Changing Views of Russians*. Cambridge University Press.

Shleifer, Andrei. 2005. *A Normal Country: Russia after Communism*. Harvard University Press.

Sokolowski, Alexander. 2001. "Bankrupt Government: Intra-Executive Relations and the Politics of Budgetary Irresponsibility in El'tsin's Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 53 (4): 541–72.

Solomon, Peter H. 2008. "Judicial Power in Authoritarian States: The Russian Experience." In *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*, edited by Tom Ginsburg and Tamir Moustafa, 261. Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Brian D. 2011. *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion After Communism*. Cambridge University Press.

Volkov, Vadim. 1999. "Violent Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51 (5): 741–54.

———. 2000. "Between Economy and the State: Private Security and Rule Enforcement in

Russia.” *Politics & Society* 28 (4): 483–501.

———. 2002. *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*. Cornell University Press.

———. 2008. “Standard Oil and Yukos in the Context of Early Capitalism in the United States and Russia.”