

Course syllabus

Explaining Contemporary Russian Politics: Institutions and Practices 2019-2020

For the Master Program 41.04 .04 "Politics. Economics. Philosophy"

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Course Description

Prerequisites

Basics of philosophy, basics of contemporary history, basics of political science (preferable).

Course Type

Compulsory. 48 hours of classwork

142 hours of homework

Abstract

The course is intended to introduce the students to contemporary Russian politics. It is designed as an overview of principal political institutions of the Russian state. These institutions are analyzed through the lens of comparative political science using neoinstitutional methodological approach, looking not only at the formal framework, but also on the actual performance of actors and institutions, which evolved in Russia since early 1990s. The course covers not only state institutions, but looks at the “agents of change” such as private enterprise, civil society, political culture, collective action, etc.

The course aims at strengthening students’ knowledge of contemporary Russia, developing skills to interpret and analyze political events, intellectual and historical outlook, to maintain professional and public discussion.

Learning Objectives

- acquaint the students with the main institutions, events and actors of contemporary Russian politics and teach them the basic skills of its interpretation and analysis;
- provide knowledge of basic ideas and concepts of comparative political science and teach students the skill of applying theoretical knowledge to analysis of individual polities and societies;
- advance the students' skills of analysis, rhetorical strategies and presentation techniques.

Learning Outcomes

- competencies to understand and analyze political events using the theoretical knowledge;
- competence to use complex approaches to analysis of political events, combining the “thick description” approach (case study) with comparative theoretical concepts;
- develop the skills of applied political science, preparing students for professional careers.

Grading system

Participation in the class (attendance, activity, written test, etc):	50 per cent
Short essay:	20 per cent
Final Exam (written):	30 per cent

Course Plan

Theme 1. Russia's way to modernity. Specific features of Russia's political development and the model of post-Communist transition.

Concepts of modernization, political development, democratization and its application to Russian studies. Historic prerequisites of modernization processes in Russia.

Theme 2. From the USSR to Russia. The “Soviet stage” of transition.

The early stages of political transition in the “Soviet space”: universal trends and country specifics. *Perestroika* as a phenomenon of political transition. Stages and logic of transformations.

Theme 3. Institutional design of the Russian state. Opportunities and problems.

Political context of the emergence of modern Russian state and adoption of the Constitution. Constitutional framework and political practices as factors of institutional development. The impact of institutional choice on the nature of transformation processes. Constitutional norms and realities of politics. Formal institutions and informal practices. The problem of “limited uncertainty” in the Russian context. Timeline of institutional development.

Theme 4. Presidency and the executive branch of power in Russia

Opportunities and risks of presidentialism/

The Russian model of presidency: between “semipresidentialism” and “superpresidentialism”.

The specifics of “semipresidentialism” in Russia.

Presidency and the cabinet: The “dual executive” and the myth of the “Russian model”.

The evolution of presidency-cabinet relations. Cabinet changes as a phenomenon of political development.

The problem of succession of power in the Russian presidential regime.

Theme 5. The legislative branch of power in Russia

Strengths and weaknesses of the Russian parliament.

Institutional role of the legislature.

Evolution of the Russian Duma: from the First to the Seventh.

Political and ideological divides in the Duma, mechanisms of decision-making.

Evolution of the Federation Council.

Theme 6. Checks and balances in the Russian political system

Theoretical approach to the study of checks and balances and its applicability to Russia.

The triangle: president – cabinet – legislature.

Legislative and non-legislative powers of the presidency.

Theme 7. Russian model of neocorporatism

Neocorporatism as a model. Distinction between “classic” and contemporary models.

Neocorporatist traits and practices in the Russian political system: prerequisites, functions.

Russian model of bureaucratic authoritarianism.

Theme 8. “Agents of change” in contemporary Russia. Government and private enterprise.

“Development state” as a concept; applicability in post-Soviet space.

Achievements and limitation of the government structures as the agent of development.

Measurement of development. Russia in international ratings. The case of progress in the WB “Ease of Doing Business” rating.

Private enterprise as an agent of change.

Evolution of relations between business and government. The controversial concept of “oligarchy”.

Business associations in Russia.

Theme 9. Civil Society in Russia

Specificity of emergence and development of civil society in Russia: comparative politics approach.
The problems of “social capital” and “horizontal confidence” in Russia as an explanation.
Achievements and limitations of civil society in Russia. The problem of GONGO’s.
Civil society and the government. The “third sector” in Russia.

Theme 10. The Russian model of federalism: the center and the regions.

Center-periphery relations as one of key political cleavages. Its role in Russia.
Russian model of federalism: constitutional framework and evolution.
“Ethnic factor” in the Russian federal relations.
Local government in Russia

Theme 11. Political culture and political subcultures in Russia.

The concept of political culture and political subcultures.
Different approaches to interpretation of political subcultures in Russia: “three of four Russias”
Evolution of political subcultures in Russia.

Theme 12. Political pluralism and political competition in Russia.

Emergence of political pluralism in Russia. Cleavages and divides.
The impact of electoral system on the shape of political competition, representation and efficiency of governance. The concept of “two majorities” (presidential and parliamentary elections).
Evolution of the electoral system and its effects.
Reforms of political system: 2012-2013 and its effects.
Political regime and public policy.

Theme 13. Political parties in Russia

Role and functions of political parties in a political system: comparative politics approach and Russian realities.
Evolution of party system in Russia.
Principal political parties in Russia.
The phenomenon of “post-Soviet party of power”.

Theme 14. Collective action in Russia. The phenomenon of mass movements and “color revolutions” in Russia and the post-Communist space.

The phenomenon of mass political movements.
“Color revolutions”: conflicting definitions. Prerequisites, features, effects. Demonstration effect of colored revolutions in post-Soviet space.
Protest movements in Russia in 2011-2012 and after.

Readings (optional)

Bunce, Valerie. The Prospects for a Color Revolution. In: *Daedalus* Spring 2017, Vol. 146, No2. Russia beyond Putin

Greene, S. From Boom to Bust: **Hardship, Mobilization & Russia's Social Contract** . In: *Daedalus* Spring 2017, Vol. 146, No2. Russia beyond Putin

Theme 15. Russia's political development in a comparative context.

Definition of “post-Communist space”. Comparative politics and post-Communist space. Russia in the post-Communist space.

The role of institutional choice in political development of post-Communist states.

Measuring success of transformation processes in the post-Communist space.

Readings (required)

Leichtova, Magda. *Misunderstanding Russia : Russian Foreign Policy and the West*, Routledge, 2014. - URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1698618> - ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete

Chaisty, Paul. *Legislative Politics and Economic Power in Russia*, Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2006. - URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2057887> - ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete

Readings (optional)

Remington, Thomas. *Politics in Russia*. Edition No 07. . Longman, 2012

Makarenko Melville. How Do Transitions to Democracy Get Stuck, and Where? In: *Democracy in a Russian Mirror*. Adam Przeworski (ed). Cambridge 2015. 268-97

Melville A. Y., Mironyuk M. G. “Bad Enough Governance”: State Capacity and Quality of Institutions in Post-Soviet Autocracies. *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 2016. Vol. 32. No. 2. P. 132-151.

Melville A. Y., Stukal D., Mironyuk M. G. King of the Mountain”, or Why Postcommunist Autocracies Have Bad Institutions. *Russian Politics and Law*. 2014. Vol. 52. No. 2. P. 7-29.

Bunin, I, and Makarkin, A. *Russia: Business and State* Russie. Nei. Visions No 88, IFRI, Russia/NIS Center November_2015.

Polyakov, Leonid. “Conservatism”in Russia: Political Tool or Historic Choice? Russie. Nei. Visions No 90, IFRI, Russia/NIS Center December_2015.

Makarenko, B. The Post-Soviet Party of Power: United Russia in Comparative Context. *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 50, no. 1, January–February 2012, pp. 54–83.