

**Instructor:** [Sergey Sanovich](#)

**Best contact:** [sanovich@nyu.edu](mailto:sanovich@nyu.edu)

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/SergeySanovich>

**Time** Monday, 6.20–8.20 p.m.

**Location:** 19 Univ. Pl., Rm. 224

**Office Hours:** Schedule Zoom by email

POL-GA 3501 — INTRL-GA 1731 — RUSSN-GA 1001

# Russian Politics since 1991

Preliminary Version



## Overview

Are we doomed? Is the future – tyranny, corruption, and war? Is the nature of great power competition fatal for democracy, the rule of law, and liberalism? And why Vladimir Putin, a mediocre mid-level secret police agent from the backwaters of the Cold War, came to symbolize the urgency of these questions in the early 2020s?

These are just some of the questions we will cover in the Russian Politics class. Our discussion will be organized around a select few turning points that determined the trajectory of the Russian journey and its global consequences, with an eye also on how social science informed – and learnt from – these developments. In the process, we will learn a lot about Russia, even more about how democracies and autocracies work and fail, and, simultaneously, will unlearn many myths that continue to surround all these subjects, starting with the claim that Putin was inevitable and is irreplaceable.

Come to learn which lessons Putin took from oligarchs who engineered his rise to power, which from Stalin, and which from his former comrades-in-arms at the KGB foreign intelligence directorate. Stay to discover how Russians live aside from Putin and what are the prospects of bottom-up democratization.

## Requirements

Generally, assignments in this class are designed to train you in tasks that you will encounter at later stages of your career. They are deliberately chosen and designed (with flexibility) to be applicable to a wide set of possible professional settings.

**Questions** In this class, as elsewhere, what matters is not just reading, but the ability to think critically about the arguments presented to you. Do the readings answer the questions you had about the issue/theme/event/etc.? Is their theory (spelled out or implied) sound? Is their evidence convincing? Did they develop the argument fully and follow their own logic? Was their prediction proven right or wrong? If you buy their argument, what questions do you have about its applicability elsewhere? If not, what is missing: an overlooked variable; correct assignment of causes and effects; some other alternative explanation? **At least 2 questions are due by email 1 hour and 20 minutes before the class starts (i.e. by 5 pm on Monday).**

**Discussions** Participation in the in-class discussion should, first of all, help other students learn something that they might have missed from the readings or discard something that they might have picked up but you believe is wrong. Bringing additional evidence from beyond the syllabus is welcome, but especially so if connected to the assigned readings: correcting and/or augmenting them. **Most importantly, discussion of any particular piece of evidence or source should include evaluation and comparison with other sources.** Weak arguments in one source shall be identified and replaced with strong arguments from another, leading us all to sound conclusions, or at least pointed questions.

**Paper Proposal and Final Paper** This class is designed to introduce you to Russian politics and to social science literature in sufficient depth to enable you to explore a topic of your choosing in a serious piece of writing. This could be a standard research paper (or, for those preparing for PhD and with my approval, a research design); a journalistic investigation; a market brief; a policy memorandum; a grant proposal; or another format approved by the instructor. Aim at 20 pages, including front- and backmatter.

You will **first** need to choose the topic and format. Zoom office hours requests for these purposes are welcome.

**Second** you will need to come up with the tentative title, write a half-page abstract, section breakdown, and include the five key sources from your future bibliography. This **paper proposal will be due Friday, March 11th at midnight ET by email**. I will then schedule individual consultations to provide feedback.

**Final paper will be due Friday, May 13th at midnight ET by email.**

From Prof. John Fousek: “**Writing matters** – Successful written work in graduate school is clear, direct, and logically cohesive. Each writing assignment provides an opportunity to hone your craft as a writer and strengthen your English language prose writing skills. That applies to native-speakers and second-language writers alike – and to professional writers as well as IR master’s degree students.” **Attribution** of other people’s work matters no less.

For references, use Chicago author-date system, as described here: <https://guides.nyu.edu/citations/chicago>.

## Grades

Questions you send ahead of classes account for 15% of the final grade. Your contribution to the in-class discussion is worth 20%. Paper proposal is worth 15%. The final paper accounts for the remaining 50%.

## Literature

The only book you need to buy is:

McFaul, Michael. 2018. *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin’s Russia*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

I promise, it’s worth the money. This is also the only book that you need to read from cover to cover, so **start early**. All other readings will be available in PDF from the instructor.

## Course Outline

Week 1 ..... What Russia Is Not: USSR Before Its Collapse

Week 2 ..... Russian 1990s: Postmortems vs. Contemporaneous Accounts

Week 3 ..... Economic Transition

Week 4 ..... Winners Take All and Lose Everything: The War of Yeltsin's Succession

Week 5 ..... Divide and Rule: Oligarchs, then Reformers

Week 6 ..... Building an Autocracy

**Paper proposal is due**

Week 7 ..... Electing the Autocrat

Week 8 ..... Potemkin Village Comes Alive: Medvedev's Interregnum

Week 9 ..... Resistance and Repression

Week 10 ..... Foreign Policy out of Domestic Fears

Week 11 ..... War

Week 12 ..... Information Wars at Home and Abroad

Week 13 ..... Russia as It Is

Week 14 ..... Future?

**Final paper is due**

## Week 1: What Russia Is Not: USSR Before Its Collapse

1/24/22

Gaidar, Yegor. 2010. *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia*. Translated by Antonina W. Bouis. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, CHAPTERS 4–5

Gaidar, Yegor. 2003. “The Inevitability of Collapse of the Socialist Economy.” In *The Economics of Russian Transition*, edited by Yegor Gaidar. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press

Aron, Leon. 2006. “The ”Mystery” of the Soviet Collapse.” *Journal of Democracy* 17 (2): 21–35

### *Additional readings*

Watch [“The Garage”](#) (turn on English subtitles) or [“Khrustalyov, My Car!”](#) (turn on English subtitles)

## Week 2: Russian 1990s: Postmortems vs. Contemporaneous Accounts

1/31/22

### **Postmortems**

Gel'man, Vladimir. 2015. *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*. University of Pittsburgh Press, CHAPTER 3 “THE ROARING 1990S: CONFLICTS AND COMPROMISES”

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, CHAPTER 5.N: “ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE REGIME UNDER YELTSIN (1992–1999)” (PP. 190–197)

Fish, M. Steven. 2005. *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics*. Cambridge University Press, CHAPTERS 1.1 AND 2.3

### **Contemporaneous Accounts**

Avtonomov, Alexei. 2000. “The President and Parliament in Contemporary Russia.” In *Russia after the Cold War*, edited by Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross. Routledge

- Troxel, Tiffany. 2002. *Parliamentary Power in Russia, 1994-2001: President vs Parliament*. Springer, CHAPTER 8 “CONCLUSIONS: PARLIAMENTARY POWER AND THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND CONSOLIDATION PROCESS IN RUSSIA”
- White, Stephen. 2000. “Political Parties.” In *Russia after the Cold War*, edited by Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross. Routledge
- Gel'man, Vladimir, Sergei Ryzhenkov, and Michael Brie. 2005. “Nizhnii Novgorod Oblast: The Limits of “Elite Settlement”.” In *Making and Breaking Democratic Transitions: The Comparative Politics of Russia's Regions*. Rowman & Littlefield
- Daniels, Robert. 1999. “Evgenii Primakov: Contender by Chance.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 46 (5): 27–36
- Checkel, Jeffrey. 1998. “Primakov in Context: The Myths and Realities of Russia's New Prime Minister.” PONARS Policy Memo 41, ARENA, Universitetet I Oslo. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/primakov-in-context-the-myths-and-realities-of-russia-s-new-prime-minister/>

*Additional readings*

- Surovell, Jeffrey. 2005. “Yevgenii Primakov: ‘Hard-Liner’ or Casualty of the Conventional Wisdom?” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21 (2): 223–247
- McFaul, Michael. 1999. “Authoritarian and Democratic Responses to the Financial Meltdown in Russia.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 46 (4): 22–32

**Week 3: Economic Transition**

2/7/22

- Peck, Merton, and Thomas Richardson. 1991. *What Is To Be Done? Proposals for the Soviet Transition to the Market*. New Haven and Vienna: Yale University Press / International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), CHAPTER 1 “INTRODUCTION”, “AUTHORS” PAGE FROM A SEPARATE EDITION, CHAPTER 2 “THE SOVIET ECONOMIC CRISIS: STEPS TO AVERT COLLAPSE”
- Kotkin, Stephen. 2008. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*. Oxford University Press, CHAPTER 5.N: “THE ILLUSIONS OF REFORM...” (PP. 118–124)
- Treisman, Daniel. 2010. ““Loans for Shares” Revisited.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26 (3): 207–227

Guriev, Sergei, and Nikita Melnikov. 2018. "Happiness Convergence in Transition Countries." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 46 (3): 683–707

Gel'man, Vladimir. 2020. "'Liberals' vs. 'Democrats': Ideational Trajectories of Russia's Post-Communist Transformation." *Social Sciences*, Translated by Yevgeny Filippov, 51 (2): 4–24

## **Week 4: Winners Take All and Lose Everything: The War of Yeltsin's Succession**

2/14/22

Hellman, Joel. 1998. "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions." *World Politics* 50 (2): 203–234

Shleifer, Andrei, and Daniel Treisman. 2001. *Without a Map: Political Tactics and Economic Reform in Russia*. MIT Press, CHAPTER 7 "THE SEARCH FOR A CURE"

Hoffman, David. 2011. *The Oligarchs: Wealth And Power In The New Russia*. PublicAffairs, CHAPTERS 11–16, EPILOGUE, AFTERWORD TO THE 2003 PAPERBACK EDITION, POSTSCRIPT

Ostrovsky, Arkady. 2016. *The Invention of Russia: The Rise of Putin and the Age of Fake News*. Reprinted edition with a new preface. Penguin, CHAPTER 7 "THE OLIGARCHS' WAR"

### *Additional readings*

Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, CHAPTER 4: THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF ECONOMIC REFORM

FEBRUARY 21ST: NO CLASS – PRESIDENTS' DAY

## **Week 5: Divide and Rule: Oligarchs, then Reformers**

2/28/22

Belton, Catherine. 2020. *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West*. Farrar, Straus / Giroux, CHAPTERS 6, 9

- Sakwa, Richard. 2014. *Putin and the Oligarch: The Khodorkovsky-Yukos Affair*. Bloomsbury Publishing, CHAPTERS 3–5
- Sonin, Konstantin. 2008. “State Capture and Corruption in Transition Economies.” In *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, 2nd edition, edited by Steven Durlauf and Lawrence Blume. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK
- Sutela, Pekka. 2005. “Did Putin’s Reforms Catapult Russia to Durable Growth?” BOFIT Online, Bank of Finland Institute for Economies in Transition. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bof/handle/123456789/12605>
- Gel’man, Vladimir, and Andrey Starodubtsev. 2016. “Opportunities and Constraints of Authoritarian Modernisation: Russian Policy Reforms in the 2000s.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 68 (1): 97–117

## **Week 6: Building an Autocracy**

3/7/22

- Gessen, Masha. 2013. *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*. Riverhead Books, CHAPTER 2 “THE ELECTION WAR”
- Treisman, Daniel. 2011. *The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev*. Simon / Schuster, CHAPTER 8 “THE MOUNTAINS”
- Petrov, Nikolay, and Eugenia Nazrullaeva. 2018. “Regional Elites and Moscow.” In *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin’s Russia*, edited by Daniel Treisman. Brookings Institution Press

**Friday, March 11th, midnight ET: Paper proposal is due by email**

MARCH 14TH: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

## **Week 7: Electing the Autocrat**

3/21/22

- Enikolopov, Ruben, et al. 2013. “Field Experiment Estimate of Electoral Fraud in Russian Parliamentary Elections.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110 (2): 448–452



Kobak, Dmitry, Sergey Shpilkin, and Maxim Pshenichnikov. 2018. "Putin's Peaks: Russian Election Data Revisited." *Significance* 15 (3): 8–9

Simpser, Alberto. 2013. *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections: Theory, Practice, and Implications*. Cambridge University Press, CHAPTER 1.1

Frye, Timothy, et al. 2017. "Is Putin's Popularity Real?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33 (1): 1–15

## **Week 8: Potemkin Village Comes Alive: Medvedev's Interregnum**

3/28/22

Biagioli, Mario, and Vincent Antonin Lépinay, eds. 2019. *From Russia with Code: Programming Migrations in Post-Soviet Times*. Duke University Press, CHAPTERS 5–6, 3

Sanovich, Sergey. 2020. "Exiles from Their Own Success: How Do Russian Programmers Succeed under Putin and Why Do They Still Continue to Leave?" *Contemporary Sociology* 49 (6): 491–496

## **Week 9: Resistance and Repression**

4/4/22

Judah, Ben. 2013. *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin*. Yale University Press, CHAPTERS 8-9

Enikolopov, Ruben, Alexey Makarin, and Maria Petrova. 2020. "Social Media and Protest Participation: Evidence From Russia." *Econometrica* 88 (4): 1479–1514

Gambarato, Renira, and Sergei Medvedev. 2015. "Grassroots Political Campaign in Russia: Alexey Navalny and Transmedia." In *Promoting Social Change and Democracy Through Information Technology*, edited by Vikas Kumar and Jakob Svensson, 165–192. Hershey, PA: IGI Global

Rogov, Kirill. 2018a. "The Art of Coercion: Repressions and Repressiveness in Putin's Russia." *Russian Politics* 3 (2): 151–174

## Week 10: Foreign Policy out of Domestic Fears

4/11/22

Burakova, Larisa, and Robert Lawson. 2013. *Georgia's Rose Revolution: How One Country Beat the Odds, Transformed Its Economy, and Provided a Model for Reformers Everywhere*. The Antigua Forum. Guatemala: Universidad Francisco Marroquín

Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (3): 535–551

Rogov, Kirill. 2016. "'Crimean Syndrome'." *Russian Politics & Law* 54 (1): 28–54

### *Additional readings*

Rogov, Kirill. 2017. "Political Reaction in Russia and "Party Groups" in Russian Society." *Russian Politics & Law* 55 (2): 77–114

Finkel, Evgeny, and Yitzhak M. Brudny. 2012. "Russia and the Colour Revolutions." *Democratization* 19 (1): 15–36

Kazantsev, Andrei, et al. 2020. "Russia's Policy in the "Frozen Conflicts" of the Post-Soviet Space: From Ethno-Politics to Geopolitics." *Caucasus Survey* 8 (2): 142–162, 'INTRODUCTION' AND 'CONCLUSIONS' ONLY

## Week 11: War

4/18/22

McFaul, Michael. 2018. *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Götz, Elias, and Michael McFaul. 2021. "The Power of Putin in Russian Foreign Policy." *International Security* 46 (1): 196–200

### *Additional readings*

McFaul, Michael. 2020. "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy." *International Security* 45 (2): 95–139

Treisman, Daniel. 2016. "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin." *Foreign Affairs* 95 (3): 47–54

## Week 12: Information Wars at Home and Abroad

4/25/22

Sanovich, Sergey. 2018. "Computational Propaganda in Russia: The Origins of Digital Misinformation." In *Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media*, edited by Samuel Woolley and Philip Howard, 21–40. Oxford University Press

Nossik, Anton. 2014. "I Helped Build Russia's Internet. Now Putin Wants to Destroy It." *New Republic*, May 15, 2014. Accessed May 26, 2014. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117771/putins-internet-crackdown-russias-first-blogger-reacts>

Stukal, Denis, Sergey Sanovich, Joshua A. Tucker, and Richard Bonneau. 2019. "For Whom the Bot Tolls: A Neural Networks Approach to Measuring Political Orientation of Twitter Bots in Russia." *SAGE Open* 9 (2): 1–16

Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2019. "Informational Autocrats." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 100–127

Farrell, Henry, and Abraham L. Newman. 2021. "The Janus Face of the Liberal International Information Order: When Global Institutions Are Self-Undermining." *International Organization*, 1–26

### *Additional readings*

Tucker, Joshua, et al. 2017. "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (4): 46–59

Pomerantsev, Peter. 2014. *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*. PublicAffairs

Soldatov, Andrei, and Irina Borogan. 2015. *The Red Web: The Struggle Between Russia's Digital Dictators and the New Online Revolutionaries*. PublicAffairs

Lukito, Josephine, et al. 2019. "The Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: How Russia's Internet Research Agency Tweets Appeared in U.S. News as Vox Populi." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25 (2): 196–216

## Week 13: Russia as It Is

5/2/22

*Redakciya*, “E-scooters and Sharing Economy” (turn on English subtitles)

Zubarevich, Natalia. 2012. “Four Russias: Rethinking the Post-Soviet Map.” *openDemocracy*. (Russian original: Vedomosti), March 29, 2012. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/four-russias-rethinking-post-soviet-map/>

Zubarevich, Natalia. 2015. “Four Russias and a New Political Reality.” In *Putin’s Russia: How It Rose, How It Is Maintained, and How It Might End*, edited by Leon Aron, 22–35. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute

Goble, Paul. 2019. “Zubarevich’s ‘Four Russias’ Once Again at Odds and the First is Set to Win Out, Volkov Says.” *Window on Eurasia – New Series*, August 7, 2019. <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2019/08/zubarevichs-four-russias-once-again-at.html>

Rogov, Kirill. 2018b. “The Elephant and the Whale of Russian Sociality.” *Russian Politics & Law* 56 (3): 170–174

Acemoglu, Daron, and James Robinson. 2021. *Non-Modernization: Power-Culture Trajectories and the Dynamics of Political Institutions*. Working Paper 29007. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w29007>

Treisman, Daniel. 2020. “Economic Development and Democracy: Predispositions and Triggers.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (1): 241–257

### *Additional readings*

Packer, George. 2021. “How America Fractured Into Four Parts.” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/07/george-packer-four-americas/619012/>

Fiorina, Morris. 2018. “Do Partisans Hate Each Other More Than Ever?” *Reason.com*. <https://reason.com/2018/10/28/do-partisans-hate-each-other-m/>

Silver, Nate. 2016. “Education, Not Income, Predicted Who Would Vote For Trump.” *FiveThirtyEight*. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/education-not-income-predicted-who-would-vote-for-trump/>

## Week 14: Future?

5/9/22

Mearsheimer, John J. 2019. "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order." *International Security* 43 (4): 7–50

Mearsheimer, John J. 2014b. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs* 93 (5): 77–89

McFaul, Michael, Stephen Sestanovich, and John J. Mearsheimer. 2014. "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?" *Foreign Affairs* 93 (6): 167–178

Mearsheimer, John J. 2014a. "Taiwan's Dire Straits." *The National Interest*, no. 130, 29–39

Navalny, Alexey "The Parasites" (turn on English subtitles)

### *Additional readings*

Holmes, Stephen, and Ivan Krastev. 2020. *The Light That Failed*. Simon / Schuster

Mearsheimer, John J. 2018. *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*. Yale University Press

Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt. 2016. "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy." *Foreign Affairs* 95 (4): 70–83

**Friday, May 13th, midnight ET: Final paper is due by email**