Politics of Russia and the Post-Soviet States

This course examines political developments in Russia and the other fourteen Soviet successor states that gained (or regained) independence following the demise of the Soviet Union. The first part of the course provides a historical overview that surveys the entire time period from 1917 to 1991. Primary focus is placed on the unique mixture of Soviet legacies of communist political institutions, state socialist economic policies, and ethnofederalism. Much of the literature on the Soviet period is Moscow-centered. We will spend some time, however, investigating how the policies of the central government played out in the various Soviet republics.

After providing this historical overview, post-Soviet political developments will be analyzed and individual cases and institutions compared. Each week’s readings introduce theoretical questions and broader issues in comparative politics that will help to structure our discussion. No previous work in the region is required, although having had courses on comparative politics will be helpful. Overall, students will be given the analytic tools necessary to compare political developments in the former Soviet Union and beyond.

Please note that a portion of each week will be devoted to current news and events in Russia and the post-Soviet states. Overall, this is a very exciting time to be studying Russia and the post-Soviet states, and we will definitely reserve time to discuss developing events within the region.

Course Requirements:
You will be evaluated based on your performance on class participation, mid-term and final exams, and a research paper (see following).

Grading:
Mid-term 25% Due March 7 at the beginning of class
Final 25% Due May 9 at 3PM (Faner 3167)
Paper proposal 5% Due March 19 at the beginning of class
Paper 25% Due May 2 at the beginning of class
Discussion participation 20%

Comparative Research Paper: You are asked to write a research paper (10 pages for undergraduates, 15 for graduate students) that compares one political development or public policy in two countries, at least one of which should be a former Soviet republic. The topic area of your comparative study and the choice of countries remain flexible. This large project will be broken up into smaller steps: You will need to write a 2 to 3 page proposal by March 19th, which includes your topic, countries of study, tentative argument and annotated
bibliography. I will provide feedback on your proposal. The final draft of your paper will be due on Friday, May 2nd. We will work in peer-review teams to revise, edit and polish each other’s work. You will improve each draft of the research paper based on peer comments and those of the instructor.

**Required Books (Available for purchase at the SIU Bookstore):**


**Course Schedule:**
Please note I reserve the right to modify the syllabus as necessary.
*To be uploaded to on-line course reserves (www.lib.siu.edu).

**Week 1: Introduction: The Formation of the Soviet Union and Nationalities Policy**
January 13  
Introduction

January 15-17  
**The Formation of the Soviet Union and Soviet Nationalities Policy**


**Week 2: Lenin and Stalin.**
January 20  
Martin Luther King Day Holiday

January 22-24  
**Soviet Political Institutions under Lenin and Stalin**


**Week 3**
January 27  
**State Socialist Economic Institutions**


January 29  
**Discussion: What does the GULAG tell us about the Soviet political system?**

January 31
Discussion: Soviet System Expands – Eastern Europe

**Week 4: The Soviet Union after Stalin: Thaw and Stagnation.**

**Feb 3: Film – Burnt by the Sun**

February 5, 7
Suny, chapter 18, “The Paradoxes of Brezhnev’s Long Reign.”

**Week 5: The End of the Regime.**

February 10, 12


February 14
Begin “Transitions from Communism”.

**Week 6: Transitions from Communism**

February 17

February 19  
**Discussion: Transition or Continuity?**

February 21
Introduction to Democratization (Lecture)

**Week 7: Democratization, Democratic Consolidation**

February 24  **Discussion: Democratization in the Post-Soviet States**

February 26  **Discussion: Electoral Fraud**

February 28  **Discussion: Corruption.** (and finish electoral fraud)

**Week 8**
March 3 – The Emergence of Presidential Government in Russia.

March 5 – Review

March 7 – Midterm (in class)

**Week 9: March 10, 12, 14**  **Spring Break**

**Week 10: Transformation to a Market Economy: Post-Soviet Economic Reform**

March 17  
*Åslund, Anders, How Capitalism was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007,

  Introduction, pp. 1-10.
  Chapter 2, “Shock Therapy versus Gradualism,” pp. 29-56,

March 19  
March 21  
**Discussion: Post-Soviet Business Practices**

**Week 11 – Post 1991: The Development of the Rule of Law and the Judiciary**


March 26, 28  
**Discussion: The Development of the Rule of Law and the Judiciary**
Financial Times, December 17, 2013.

**Week 12 – Political Parties, Party Systems and Electoral Behavior**

March 31: Lecture

April 2, 4  
**Discussion: The Nature of Parties and Party Systems**

**Week 13 – Russian Campaigns**

April 7

April 9 and 11 No Class! MPSA conference.
Week 14 – Final Topics: The Russian Presidency Today & Democratic Backsliding in Russia (April 14, 16, 18)


Daniel Treisman. 2007. “Putin’s Silovarchs.” *Orbis*.


Week 15: The Politics of Multiethnicity (April 21, 13, 25)


Plus: Peer group work.

Week 16: April 28, 30, May 2: Geopolitics and The Color Revolutions


Final Exam: Wednesday, May 7, 12:50-2:50p.m.