OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

This course explores selectively and in depth key realities of, perspectives on, and trends in the political system of contemporary Russia, as it has emerged, developed, and, the critics would say, become frozen in place in the generation since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This course was initially designed to meet the needs of graduate students in the Government Department, the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, and other units. But the class has always welcomed undergraduates. They may find the course to be of particular interest if they have already studied the politics or history of Russia and the region in some form, or if they are interested in scholarly work about regimes and regime change. This year, as a response to the current academic emergency, the course has officially been listed as an undergraduate-graduate hybrid – Gov 94TC for the undergrads, Gov 2218 for the grad students. Gov 94TC will be accessible via the standard Gov 94 balloting mechanism (going through the Gov Department Undergraduate Office) and will have separate requirements for written work. The joint product will be subject to an enrollment cap, so as to protect the small-group flavor of the project.
Unlike a more basic and comprehensive survey course, Gov 94TC focuses on theoretical approaches and puzzles, multi-layered issues, instructive comparisons across space and time, and research methods. The issues and controversies taken up in individual sessions have been chosen to help illuminate the current Russian regime as a whole and give some insight into change prospects after two decades with Vladimir Putin as supreme leader.

Student preferences for particulars in subject matter will be taken into account as much as possible – the layout by week given below is not fixed in stone. Students with a foreign-policy or international-security orientation are welcome and can be accommodated in a variety of ways.

Prospective students wanting to know more or unsure whether the course is suitable for them are encouraged to speak with me (email and phone above, Zoom session for week of August 17 to be accessed through the Canvas site).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

In Gov 94TC, the **STANDARD SCHEME** is to assign grades proportionally for:

- participation – 30 percent;
- response papers – 30 percent;
- final paper – 40 percent.

**Participation:** Students are expected to do the readings in advance, have a say in the weekly meetings, and carry out a few low-key verbal contributions – ins and outs to be finalized once enrollment is known.

**Response papers:** Students are to write brief responses to the readings for any three of weeks 2 through 11. A first response paper must be submitted by no later than week 6 (October 9). Length is three or four pages (double-spaced, 12 font). The essays may either synthesize the readings or bear down on a selected aspect. Please email them to me by noon on the day of class – in MS Word, for ease of commenting on the text.

**Final paper:** The final assignment is a research paper of approximately fifteen pages due on the last day of the fall semester reading period in December.

**ALTERNATIVE SCHEME** – research paper:

As an alternative, undergraduates may opt for the same requirements as the graduate students registered under Gov 2218. Participation would count for 25 percent; 75 percent would go to a major research paper of about twenty-five pages. It may usefully be framed by one of the analytical issues explicitly
examined in the course, although this is not necessary. The paper should be
grounded in either a thorough canvassing and evaluation of secondary sources
or some research in primary sources, be they in translation or in the original for
those who happen to read the Russian language. Precise topics would be worked
out with me by mid-October. The paper is due on the last day of the December
reading period.

**BOOKSTORE AND READINGS**

The following books are in stock for purchase at the Harvard Coop:


And if you want something more academic than Belton for Topic 7, one of:


The books can, of course, be acquired elsewhere. They will be on library reserve digitally and, when feasible, physically at Lamont Library in Harvard Yard. The Ledeneva volume is temporarily available for digital reading and downloading through HOLLIS (Harvard Online Library Information System).

Unless otherwise indicated, journal articles and book chapters on the syllabus will be found online, as pdf files, on the Gov 94TC Canvas site: look either at the Files tab or by week under Modules. A handful of pieces will be accessed digitally on the WWW, by clicking on the URL given below. Several book chapters will be posted as pdf’s on Canvas, and several read online through Hollis.
DISCUSSION TOPICS AND SCHEDULE AND WEEK-BY-WEEK READINGS

1. INTRODUCTORY SESSION (SEPT. 4)

Start going through Belton, Putin’s People. Look for now for the main narrative.

2. CULTURE, CIVILIZATION, HISTORY . . . AND ALL THAT (SEPT. 11)


3. REGIME AND OTHER THEORIES (SEPT. 18)

Timothy J. Colton, “Regimeness, Hybridity, and Russian System Building as an Educational Project,” Comparative Politics 50 (April 2018), 455–73.


Svolik, Politics of Authoritarian Rule, chaps. 1, 2, 7.


Hale, Patronal Politics, intro and chap. 2.

4. **AGENCY (SEPT. 25)**


Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise?*, chap. 2.


Belton, *Putin’s People*. Read for core content and to home in on one individual agent for class discussion (to be explained).

5. **STATE AND PEOPLE: INTERTWINED PUZZLES OF STATE CAPACITY, RULE OF LAW, AND INFORMALITY (OCT. 2)**


Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise?*, intro and chaps. 1, 3, 5, 7.


6. THE POLITICS OF COMMUNICATION: MEDIA, INTERNET, PUBLIC OPINION (OCT. 9)


In addition, students are asked to spend roughly an hour exploring an opinion sub-topic of their choice (to be coordinated with other players), drawing on online data provided by one of Russia’s leading polling organizations (or several of them, if that is of interest). They will then be asked to share what they have learned with the class. The links below are to VTsIOM, the Levada Center, and FOM.

https://www.wciom.com/
https://fom.ru/ (Russian language only)

7. POLITICS AND ECONOMICS (OCT. 16)


Anders Åslund, Russia’s Crony Capitalism: The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy (Yale UP, 2019), chap. 3.
Thane Gustafson, *Klimat: Climate Change and the Future of Russia* (draft book manuscript), chap. on agriculture (“Russia’s Agricultural Renaissance and the Coming Impact of Climate Change”) – not to be circulated under any circumstances.


And read for core content one of:

- The rest of Belton, *Putin’s People*.
- Gustafson, *Bridge*.
- Markus, *Property, Predation, and Protection*.
- Szakonyi, *Politics for Profit*.

8. PATRIOTISM, NATIONALISM, XENOPHOBIA (OCT. 23)


9. CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS (OCT. 30)


10. THE POLITICS OF HISTORICAL MEMORY (NOV. 6)


Olga Malinova, “Framing the Collective Memory of the 1990s as a Legitimation Tool for Putin’s Regime,” forthcoming in *Problems of Postcommunism*.

Petr Kratochvíl and Gaziza Shakhanova, “The Patriotic Turn and Re-Building Russia’s Historical Memory: Resisting the West, Leading the Post-Soviet East?,” forthcoming in *Problems of Postcommunism*.


Ivan Kurilla, “History and Memory in Russia During the 100-Year Anniversary of the Great Revolution,” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo (January 2018).

11. ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS (NOV. 13)


Gustafson, *Klimat*, chap. 1 – not to be circulated under any circumstances.


12. DISCUSSION OF STUDENT PAPERS (NOV. 20)

13. WRAPUP (DATE TBD)