

The University of California – San Diego: Department of Political Science

Post-Communist Politics (130AA)



Instructor	Dr Graham Timmins
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Meetings	Tuesdays and Thursdays 09:30-10:50
Location	Online

Copyright Statement

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented a dramatic and hugely significant moment in history. For many it signalled the end of the socialist experiment launched with the Russian revolution in 1917 and heralded the irresistible march towards the 'End of History' and the triumph of the western ideas of liberal democracy and the free market. Thirty years later, the long-term development of the Post-Soviet Space comprising the fifteen successor states which emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Union remains uncertain and the topic of considerable academic and political discussion. Upon successful completion of this course, you will have:

- An overview of the historical context of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the establishment of the fifteen Soviet successor states and political developments up until the contemporary period.
- A critical appreciation of the contemporary situation of Russian domestic politics and the development and projection of Russian foreign policy.

- A critical appreciation of the wider geopolitical context of the post-Soviet space, and the interaction between Russia and other significant international actors.

General Learning Resources

There is an extensive body of academic and journalistic literature which provides an excellent overview on the collapse of the Soviet Union and events and debates in the post-communist period. I will provide the recommended reading for each class. You may in addition wish to make use of the following publications as they provide a useful general overview:

- Contemporary Russian Politics, Neil Robinson, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.
- Developments in Russian Politics 9th edition, Richard Sakwa et al (eds.), London: Macmillan, 2019.
- The Rise and Fall of Communism, Archie Brown, London: Vintage, 2010.
- Russian Politics and Society 4th Edition, Richard Sakwa, London: Routledge, 2008.

Academic Journals

You are strongly recommended to maintain an overview of the most recent research on the Brexit process, and the easiest way is by following the most recent editions of the following academic journals.

- International Affairs
- Foreign Affairs
- Europe-Asia Studies
- Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics
- Problems of Post-Communism
- Geopolitics
- European Security
- Russia in Global Affairs

Course Assessment

The course will be assessed through discussion comments, each comprising approximately 1000 words. You will be required to submit six comments in total, two from each section of the course. The deadlines are:

- Comments 1-2 – Monday 27 April 2020
- Comments 3-4 – Monday 18 May 2020
- Comments 5-6 – Monday 8 June 2020

Comments will be submitted through Canvas and no extensions will be granted except in exceptional circumstances. The five highest marked comments will each contribute 20% to your grade with the sixth i.e. lowest mark being discounted. I will use the following marking scheme for course:

A+	4.0	A	4.0	A-	3.7
B+	3.3	B	3.0	B-	2.7
C+	2.3	C	2.0	C-	1.7
D	1.0				
F	0.0				

I do not use a grade curve. So if every student deserves A+, that's what every student will receive. In broad terms, this is what I expect to see for each band.

- A Excellent in terms of analytical focus, critical engagement and the balance of analysis, the range of materials used, and the style of writing and presentation.

- B Good in terms of the above, but not excellent. The difference between good and excellent is typically the level of focus and critical reflection i.e. showing a deep awareness and understanding of the different sides to a discussion, evidence of reading and appropriate use of materials, in particular primary sources, and a well-polished style of academic writing with correct use of grammar and punctuation together with full and correct references for attributed materials.
- C Generally satisfactory in terms of the above but with some significant weaknesses in either some or all areas.
- D Generally poor in terms of the above with some areas not meeting minimum standards.
- F Does not meet minimum standards.

I will talk more about my expectations throughout the course and will be happy to discuss them with you if you require clarification or have concerns.

Students with Disabilities

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>). Students are required to discuss accommodation arrangements with instructors and OSD liaisons in the department **well in advance** of any exams or assignments. The OSD Liaison for the Department of Political Science is Joanna Peralta; please connect her via the [Virtual Advising Center](#) as soon as possible.

The Class Schedule

I will release recorded lectures for each session via Zoom, and you should watch these and undertake the recommended reading ahead of the interactive seminars which I will host via Zoom. The seminars will take place at the scheduled class times.

Date	Class Information	
Tue 31 Mar	Session 1 Discussion	Introduction - Post-Communism and the End of History What are the prospects for normalisation in contemporary Russia and does it matter?
Thu 2 Apr	Session 2 Discussion	The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union Was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 inevitable?
Section 1	The Post-Soviet Successor States	
Tue 7 Apr	Session 3 Discussion	Russia under Yeltsin Why did the attempted westernization of Russia in the 1990s fail?
Thu 9 Apr	Session 4 Discussion	The Commonwealth of Independent States Was the Commonwealth of Independent States a doomed concept from the outset?
Tue 14 Apr	Session 5 Discussion	The Baltic States – A ‘Return to Europe’ How secure do EU and NATO membership make the Baltic states?
Thu 16 Apr	Session 6 Discussion	Belarus and Ukraine – A Return to Geopolitics Compare the post-Soviet experiences of Belarus and Ukraine –

which state got it most right?

Tue 21 Apr	Session 7 Discussion	The Caucasus States - Life between the Powers How well have the Caucasus states navigated the demands of Great Power politics?
Thu 23 Apr	Session 8 Discussion	The Central Asian States - Sleeping Giants? What significance do the Central Asia states have for international and global politics?
Section 2	Russia under Putin	
Tue 28 Apr	Session 9 Discussion	Putin and Political Leadership in Russia What do the proposed amendments to the Russian constitution tell us about the state of democracy in Russia?
Thu 30 Apr	Session 10 Discussion	The Russian Party System Is there an effective opposition in modern Russia?
Tue 5 May	Session 11 Discussion	Russian Domestic Politics What kind of society is modern Russia?
Thu 7 May	Session 12 Discussion	The Russian Economy Why has the process of economic modernization in Russian proven to be so difficult?
Tue 12 May	Session 13 Discussion	Russian Foreign Policy Has Putin been successful in making Russia 'Great Again'?
Thu 14 May	Session 14 Discussion	The Ukraine Conflict What legacy is the Ukraine conflict having for the future of pan-European cooperation?
Section 3	The Politics of the Post-Soviet Space and Beyond	
Tue 19 May	Session 15 Discussion	EU Foreign Policy and Russia Why did the EU-Russia strategic partnership fail?
Thu 21 May	Session 16 Discussion	Germany and Russia Is there still a special partnership between Germany and Russia?
Tue 26 May	Session 17 Discussion	US Foreign Policy and Russia Why did the US Reset in US-Russian Relations fail?
Thu 28 May	Session 18 Discussion	Russian Foreign Policy and the Middle East What is Russia's Strategy in the Middle East and how successfully is it being implemented?
Tue 2 Jun	Session 19 Discussion	The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Should the West fear the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation?

Thu 4 Jun	Session 20	Conclusions - Future Prospects and Scenarios
	Discussion	How stable is modern Russia?

Expectations and Advice

If you can accept that there are no short cuts to the acquisition of knowledge, you will already be on the way to obtaining a good grade for this course. Follow the advice below too. Your grades will improve if you do.

- Watch the recorded lecture sessions and listen carefully to which points are being highlighted.
- Do the recommended reading and think about questions.
- Think about what you are being told and what you read. Does it make sense and do you agree?
- Remember you are operating in a protected intellectual space, and what is expected is robust but courteous academic exchange.
- Do additional reading when preparing the class comments, including the use of primary source materials, and do not leave your work until the last minute.
- Ensure you provide full and accurate references for all sources of information you use, but keep to a minimum.
- When writing your class comments, concentrate on explaining rather than describing events and issues.
- Although your opinions are of interest, I would prefer to find out what you have learned.
- Use an academic style of writing. This is an exercise in intellectual discourse and communication, and stylistic conventions apply.
- Spell check your work and do your best to ensure grammatical accuracy.
- If there is anything that you do not understand about this course, ask me and I will do my best to assist.

Academic Support

Should you require academic support, please contact me by email and I will respond as soon as possible. I am happy too to make time available for individual Skype consultations where there is a need. Please remember though I am in the UK and there is a significant time difference. Please also keep in mind that I am a visiting lecturer and will not be aware of the specific rules and regulations in operation at UCSD. There may therefore be situations where it would be more appropriate to contact Natalie Ikker, the Undergraduate Student Affairs Advisor in the Department of Political Science. Keep in mind too that I will not always be familiar with academic conventions in the US. You will be invited to provide evaluate feedback at the end of the course. However, I would sincerely value comments throughout the course if there are aspects of the teaching and learning experience you would like to discuss. Please feel free to speak with me before or after class, or contact me by email.

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