

## **POLI 329: Russian Politics**

Winter 2024  
Prof. Juliet Johnson

Redefining and recreating a Russian state from the ashes of the collapsed Soviet Union has represented one of the greatest political, economic, and social challenges of our time. This course invites students to explore this transformation through a broad introduction to Russian politics. We first briefly examine the Soviet system and its collapse, followed by key elements of post-Soviet Russian politics such as formal and informal political institutions; economic transformation and state-business relations; nationalism, memory, and identity; civil society and social movements; foreign policy; and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Prerequisites POLI 212 or 227, or instructor permission.

### **Course Obligations**

<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Date Due</i>
Weekly Questions	10%	Weeks 2-6, 8-10, 12
Midterm Exam	20%	February 20 in class (Week 7)
Policy Brief or Podcast	20%	March 29 at 5pm (Week 11)
Final Exam	40%	TBD during official exam period
Conference Participation	10%	Weeks 3-6 and 8-12

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control (e.g., pandemic, earthquake, Sharknado), the content and/or evaluation scheme is subject to change. Please check MyCourses regularly, as course materials, assignments, updates, etc. will all appear there.

### **Required Readings**

Our main text is Susanne Wengle, ed., [\*Russian Politics Today: Stability and Fragility\*](#) (Cambridge 2022). It is available for purchase as a paperback or e-book from the McGill Bookstore. Chapters from the text are noted with C# in the syllabus. For up-to-date analysis, we will read several short [PONARS Eurasia Policy Memos](#) (PEPM) and watch a few introductory videos from the [PONARS Eurasia Online Academy](#) (PEOA). These are hyperlinked in the syllabus. *All other readings on the syllabus are hyperlinked and/or will be available electronically on MyCourses under Readings.* For best results, please do the readings for each week ahead of time.

### **Course Schedule**

*We will not have class on January 4* – we start on Tuesday, January 9. Lectures during Weeks 1 and 2 (that is, until the week of January 22) will run from 4:05-5:25pm on both Tuesdays and Thursdays. Conferences begin the week of January 22. During weeks in which we have conferences, the instructor will lecture on Tuesdays from 4:05-5:25pm and on Thursdays we will have special short presentations called “Russian Bites” from 4:05-4:30pm. Lectures will be recorded and posted. Russian Bites will feature either bonus themes or discussions with special guests. These Russian Bites will not be recorded/posted, but they will be offered in hybrid format.

## Assignments

### Weekly Discussion Questions

The instructor will post discussion questions for each week of lectures/readings on MyCourses, **beginning with Week 2**. Please choose ONE of these questions each week to answer in written form and submit your short, thoughtful response via MyCourses. For full credit, responses must be at least 200 words long and answer the question with reference to that week's reading(s). No footnotes or bibliography needed - just be sure that you discuss at least one reading in your answer (e.g., "As LaPorte argues"). **Responses are due by noon on Fridays, starting on January 19**. Late responses will not be accepted. You can miss one week without penalty. Save this freebie for when you get sick, when your computer crashes, etc. These responses *are not graded* – you get credit just for writing them. There are nine opportunities to submit responses. If you submit *eight or nine* full-credit responses, you will receive an A for this part of the course; seven earn an A-, six a B+, and so forth. These weekly questions will reappear on the midterm and final exams.

### Conference Participation

**Conferences will begin in Week 3 and attendance is mandatory.** Please register for a conference time on Minerva as soon as the options are posted. Conference times are first come, first served. *Please do not ask us to change your conference time or to regularly attend sessions for which you are not registered.* You should complete the readings for the week before coming to conference. Your conference grade is based on the regularity and quality of your participation in group discussions. You should be prepared to discuss the authors' main arguments, make comparisons, raise critiques, and ask questions. You may miss one conference without penalty. As with the Weekly Questions, please use this skip only if/when you really need it (e.g., for when you are sick, have an unavoidable work, family, or athletic commitment, etc.). We will not have conferences in Weeks 1-2, 7, and 13.

### Midterm Examination

**The midterm examination will take place in class on Tuesday, February 20** and will consist of three short identifications and one essay question drawn from the weekly questions. Those who miss the midterm for unavoidable reasons will take the make-up exam during class time on Tuesday, February 27. Those taking the make-up will need to watch the February 27 lecture recording later.

### Policy Brief or Podcast

In this assignment, you will respond to a prompt that will be provided by the instructor. You can choose either to write a policy brief or create a podcast. Prompts and details will be distributed later in the semester. **Your policy brief or podcast materials must be submitted via MyCourses by 5pm on Friday, March 29.** Late submissions will be accepted until April 9 at 5pm but can earn a maximum grade of B+ (e.g., if it would have earned an A or A-, it will get a B+ instead).

*Option 1:* Write a 1,250-1,500 word policy brief. The emphasis is on tight, persuasive writing. Please attach a separate bibliography, not included in the 1,250-1,500 words. You may also attach relevant tables, charts, pictures, or figures, but be selective. Please submit your brief in MS Word. Two students may also choose to collaborate on a policy brief; these joint briefs must be 2,500-3,000 words long, and both students will receive the same grade.

*Option 2:* Prepare an informative 8-10 minute podcast responding to one of the prompts. The emphasis is on engaging analysis supported with strong evidence. Two students may also choose to collaborate on a podcast; these joint podcasts must be 18-20 minutes long, and both participants will receive the same grade. Please submit the audio file, a written transcript, and a reference list.

### Final Examination

The comprehensive final examination will be given on the university-selected date during the regular final exam period. The exam will consist of four essay questions drawn from the weekly questions.

*Week 1 (Jan 9 and 11)*

### **The Soviet Legacy and the End of the USSR**

Prologue & C1: Susanne Wengle, “Stability and Fragility in Contemporary Russian Politics,” pp 1-29

Kristy Ironside, “Russian and Soviet History,” in Hale, Johnson, and Lankina, ed., *Developments in Russian Politics 10* (forthcoming 2024), pp 19-46

Alexander Dallin, “[Causes of the Collapse of the USSR](#).” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 8:4 (1992): 279-302

[BBC Timeline: Soviet Union & The Atlantic, “20 Years since the Fall of the Soviet Union”](#) (photos)

Maria Lipman and Vladislav Zubok, “[The Collapse of the Soviet Union](#),” PEOA (2022)

*Recommended:* [Cold War documentary series](#), especially E23 “The Wall Comes Down”

*Week 2 (Jan 16 and 18) - First weekly questions due January 19*

### **Memory Politics**

Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, “[Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet–Era Monuments and Post–Soviet National Identity in Moscow](#).” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92:3 (2002), pp 524-547

Félix Krawatzek and Nina Frieß, “[A Foundation for Russia? Memories of World War II for Young Russians](#).” *Nationalities Papers* (2022), pp 1-21

Carna Pistan, “[Alarming Alterations: How Memory Politics Turned the Russian Constitution into a War Weapon](#),” PEPM (2022)

Travis Frederick et al., “[From Memory Wars to War](#),” PEOA (2023)

*Week 3 (Jan 23 and 25) – Conferences begin*

### **Economic Transformation I**

Juliet Johnson, “Russia’s Economic Policies,” in *Developments in Russian Politics 10*, pp 107-125

C13: Ilya Matveev and Sarah Sokhey, “Inequality and Social Policy in Russia,” pp 293-317

C12: Stanislav Markus, “Russia’s Oligarchs,” pp 270-292

Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “[Russia’s Struggle over the Meaning of the 1990s](#),” PEPM (2019)

*Week 4 (Jan 30 and Feb 1)*

### **Economic Transformation II**

C9: Jordan Gans-Morse, “Property Rights,” pp 199-224

C14: Stephen Crowley, “Russian Labor,” pp 318-339

Watch the movie [Leviathan](#) (2014) (Be sure that you are on the McGill VPN)

*Week 5 (Feb 6 and 8)*

**Political Institutions**

C2: Jody LaPorte, “Russia’s Superpresidency,” pp 33-55

C3: Ora John Reuter and David Szakonyi, “Party Politics and Voting in Russia,” pp 56-80

C4: Lauren McCarthy, “Law, Legal Enforcement, and the Courts,” pp 81-102

Hannah Chapman, “[All Fraud Is Not Created Equal: Recent Electoral Manipulation Practices are Less Likely to Incite Public Ire](#),” PEPM (2022)

Brian Taylor, “[Understanding Putinism](#),” PEOA (2021)

*Week 6 (Feb 13 and 15)*

**Centre-Regional Relations**

C5: Evgenia Olimpieva, “The Pendulum of Center-Regional Relations,” pp 103-127

C15: Anne-Mari Sätre and Leo Granberg, “Everyday Life on Russia’s Margins,” pp 340-364

Guzel Garifullina, “[Russia’s Administrators: The Weakest Link in a Crisis](#),” PEPM (2023)

Maria Lipman et al., “[Regional Diversity in the Russian Federation](#),” PEOA (2021)

*Week 7 (Feb 20 and 22) – Midterm Feb 20, Lecture Feb 22, no conferences or weekly questions*

**Patriotism and Repression**

C17: Scott Gehlbach et al, “The Russian Media,” pp 390-407

C16: Marlene Laruelle, “Russia’s Conservative Forces and the State,” pp 365-389

C6: Nikolay Zakharov, “The Politics of Race, Racism, and Antiracism,” pp 128-148

C7: Kondakov and Novitskaya, “The Politics of Gender and Sexuality,” pp 149-172

Katie Stewart, “[Consolidating Values to Consolidate Power in Russia](#),” PEPM (2023)

“[Military-Patriotic Education in Russia](#),” PEOA (2023)

*Week 8 (Feb 27 and 29)*

**Civil Society and Protest**

C18: Natalia Forrat, “Civil Society in Russia,” pp 408-430

C19: Samuel Greene, “Protest in Russia: Discovering Power,” pp 431-456

C20: Laura Henry, “Politics of the Environment in Russia,” pp 457-481

Katerina Tertychnaya, “[Russian Protests Following the Invasion of Ukraine](#),” PEPM (2023)

*Week 9 (March 12 and 14)*

**Russia's Invasion of Ukraine** – March 12 guest lecture by Maria Popova

Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel, "Russia's Invasion and Ukraine's Resistance," in *Developments in Russian Politics 10*, pp 267-294

Tom Casier, "[No Great Russia Without Greater Russia: The Kremlin's Thinking Behind the Invasion of Ukraine](#)," *Canadian Journal of European and Russian Studies* 16:2 (2023), pp 14-29

Guzel Yusupova, "[Silence Matters: Self-Censorship and War in Russia](#)," PEPM (2023)

*Week 10 (March 19 and 21)*

**Russia and the Global Economy**

C10: Laura Solanko, "Economic Policies & Russia's Global Economic Integration," pp 225-246

C11: Mikhail Strokan and Rudra Sil, "Russia's Oil and Gas Industry," pp 247-269

Juliet Johnson, "[Are Sanctions on Russia Effective? How \(Not\) to Inform the Debate](#)," PEPM (2023)

Volodymyr Ishchenko, Ilya Matveev and Oleg Zhuravlev, "[Russian Military Keynesianism: Who Benefits from the War in Ukraine?](#)", PEPM (2023)

*Week 11 (March 26 and 28) – Policy Brief/Podcast due March 29, no weekly questions*

**Chechnya and the North Caucasus**

Marat Iliyasov, "Chechnya," in *Developments in Russian Politics 10*, pp 199-218

C21: Şener Aktürk, "Ethnicity and Religion in Russia," pp 482-505

Jean-François Ratelle, "[Armed Conflicts in the North Caucasus since 1991](#)," PEOA (2023)

*Week 12 (April 2 and 4) – Last week of conferences*

**Russian Foreign Policy**

C8: Andrei Tsygankov, "The Foreign Policy of an Aspiring Great Power," pp 173-198

Mikhail Troitskiy, "[A Final Reckoning? Sino-Russian Relations Amid Russia's War on Ukraine](#)," PEPM (2023)

*Week 13 (April 9) - Reflections on Russian Politics*

## Important Information

### Course Grading Scale

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Grade Points</i>	<i>Grade Range</i>
A	4.0	>3.85
A-	3.7	3.50-3.85
B+	3.3	3.15-3.49
B	3.0	2.85-3.14
B-	2.7	2.50-2.84
C+	2.3	2.15-2.49
C	2.0	1.85-2.14
D	1.0	1.0-1.84
F	0.0	<1.0

This course uses the standard 4.0 system for grading for all assignments. An A on an assignment is worth 4 points, an A- is worth 3.7 points, etc. To calculate your final grade, the instructor will first multiply the grade points you earned on each assignment by the relative weight of that assignment (e.g., 0.4 for the final exam), and then add the scores together to get your final grade-point average. That average will determine your final letter grade for the course (refer the grade range column). For example, if your overall grade-point average is a 3.4, you would earn a B+ in the course.

### Land Acknowledgement

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### McGill Policy on Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).” (See also McGill’s [guide to academic honesty](#).)

### On Generative AI

Learning to synthesize and evaluate readings independently is a fundamental goal of this course. Students may not copy or paraphrase directly from any generative artificial intelligence applications, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the purpose of completing assignments in this course.

### McGill Policy on Language of Submission

Conformément à la [Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill](#), chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

In accord with McGill University’s [Charter of Student Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded.

### On Copyright

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