

EURR 5101A/PSCI 5112W Russian Domestic Politics

Carleton University

Institute of European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies

Winter 2026

Mondays 11:35-2:25 pm

Brightspace: <https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/372876>

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OBJECTIVES

Russia's domestic politics have long been a source of contention among analysts, policy-makers, and historians. At one extreme, Russia has been home to radical social and political experimentation, anarchic upheavals, and world-shaking scientific innovations. At the other, it has been a conservative source of counter-revolution and autocracy that demands loyalty and conformity. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Russian Federation in 1991 seemed to herald another swing between extremes as the USSR's stagnant politics and economy gave way to a radical new democratic politics and the market. Yet within a decade, Russia's democratic experiment withered. With Vladimir Putin's rise to power, the Kremlin rehabilitated the memory of the Soviet and Tsarist past while steadily centralizing power.

Putin has now been in power for a quarter of a century, but Russian politics continue to evolve in ways that confound observers—indeed, many did not predict that Putin would launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. While the world remains transfixed by the global consequences of war in Ukraine, much depends on the domestic drivers of autocracy and war. This course focuses on the current state of domestic politics in contemporary Russia, with a particular focus on the formal and informal structures of authority, state-society relations, and the range of mechanisms by which Putin's regime maintains power. This range of topics covered is far from exhaustive, as there simply isn't enough time to address highly interesting and important topics such as political economy, regional politics, societal values, the Orthodox church, or gender. However, it is hoped that this course will provide students with an understanding of the mainsprings of the Kremlin's politics and provide them with the tools to continue researching Russia.

READINGS

All readings are required for each class. The readings will be available on Brightspace/ARES, or linked directly in this course outline. Please let me know immediately if you are having difficulty accessing any of the readings.

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

Attendance & participation	20%	Weekly
Discussion paper & presentation	25%	Due on Fridays prior to seminar
Policy memo & presentation	25%	Due on Fridays prior to seminar
Research essay proposal	Non-assessed	Friday, Feb. 27 at 12 pm
Research essay	30%	Friday, Apr. 3 at 12 pm

Attendance & participation (20%)

This is a seminar-based class, meaning that students' attendance and active participation in seminar discussions are essential to learning. *Active participation* in a seminar is different from listening to a lecture and asking questions afterward. Rather, active participation requires that all students will have read the required readings in advance of class. When reading, do not just highlight but take note of the main argument/finding, key concepts, and the kinds of evidence or data used. Think about connections between the readings (i.e., do they agree or are they at odds?). Active participation also requires active listening. *Active listening* means carefully considering other students' comments and engaging with them in a productive way—in other words, in a way that adds value to the discussion for everyone.

In all seminar discussions, mutual respect and consideration is essential. The seminar addresses topics that may hit home or seem controversial for some students. The concepts can be challenging and difficult to master. The seminar is a place where students can grapple with those ideas and issues and benefit from the feedback of the instructor and their peers.

In terms of grading:

- An A-level grade means that a student actively engages with the readings, contributes to the discussion, and listens to one's peers.
- A B-level grade means that the student participates and listens in discussions and demonstrates knowledge of the readings but does not rigorously engage with them.
- A C-level grade means that the student does not reliably participate or is disruptive.

Discussion paper & presentation (25%)

Each student will write a short discussion paper for a week's readings during the course (one paper per student) and briefly present their paper at the start of the assigned class. The papers will provide the starting point for our discussion of the readings at the start of class for each week.

Discussion papers are due on Fridays at noon before the seminar for which the readings were assigned. The presentations at the start of seminar should be no more than 5-10 minutes in length. Discussion papers should address the question for the assigned week by drawing from the readings. In other words, they should not merely summarize the readings.

The required length for discussion papers is 1000-1200 words (+/- 10%).

Policy memo & presentation (25%)

Each student will write a policy memo for a week's readings during the course (one policy memo per student) and briefly present their paper in class. Policy memos are short documents that present empirically-grounded information and scenarios for policy-makers and the policy community.

Policy memos should address the week's topic as specified in the course outline. It is expected that policy memos will draw from a range of (credible) materials beyond the assigned readings, including press sources, white papers, think tank reports, policy briefings, and so forth.

The required length for policy memos is 800-1000 words (+/- 10%).

Research essay proposal (Required but non-assessed) & research essay (30%)

Each student will develop and write a research paper related to contemporary Russian domestic politics. As a first step in this process, students will submit a short research essay proposal. Proposals are expected to be one or two paragraphs in length and include a short list of relevant articles or books to demonstrate that the topic is researchable. This assignment is required but will not be assessed. Rather, the purpose of

the assignment is to facilitate students' identification of research topics that are researchable and to provide early feedback on the framing of the topic and potential sources.

The research essay will focus on some dimension of contemporary Russian politics, including potentially topics not covered in the course. Final papers should feature research beyond the course readings, drawing primarily from scholarly sources. Primary sources may be used where appropriate, though there is no expectation that students will conduct research with Russian language sources. Further guidelines will be posted to Brightspace after the start of the semester.

The required length for the research essay is 4000 words (+/- 10%).

LATE POLICY

Late assignments will lose a half-letter grade for each day late (e.g., from A to A-) except in cases involving recognized university accommodations. You are likely to have multiple assignments due within a compressed period towards the end of the semester so plan your work in advance.

If your circumstances otherwise are likely to prevent you from submitting your assignments on time, please do not suffer in silence: get in touch to make an appointment and let's talk about it.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1	Jan 5	Introduction
PART I: HOW IS RUSSIA RULED?		
Week 2	Jan 12	The failure of democratization
Week 3	Jan 19	Debating Putin's regime
Week 4	Jan 26	Elites and the bureaucracy
Week 5	Feb 2	Domestic sources of war
PART II: EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY		
Week 6	Feb 9	State-society relations
Feb 16-20		
WINTER BREAK (FEB 16-20)		
Week 7	Feb 23	Civic activism, protest, and dissent
	Feb 27	Research essay proposal due
Week 8	Mar 2	War-induced migration and diaspora networks
PART III: MANUFACTURING CONSENT		
Week 9	Mar 9	Nationalism and patriotism
Week 10	Mar 16	Memory politics
Week 11	Mar 23	Media and propaganda
Week 12	Mar 30	Education and youth
	Apr 3	Research essay due
Week 13	Apr 6	PART IV: WHAT FUTURE FOR RUSSIAN STUDIES?

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 Jan 5 Introduction

PART I: HOW IS RUSSIA RULED?

Week 2 Jan 12 The failure of democratization

*Vladimir Gel'man. 2015. *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*. University of Pittsburgh Press. Ch.s 2-5 (pp.17-128) [e-book available]

Discussion topic: What were the critical junctures that determined whether Russia would democratize, and what factors determined their outcomes?

Policy memo topic: What lessons should the West draw from Russia's experience with regime change in the 1990s-2000s to determine how it can facilitate democratization?

Week 3 Jan 19 Debating Putin's regime

*Henry E. Hale. 2016. "25 Years After The USSR: What's Gone Wrong?" *Journal of Democracy* 27 (3): 24–35.

*Brian Taylor. 2018. *The Code of Putinism*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 1 (pp.21-55)

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

*Marlene Laruelle. 2022. "So, Is Russia Fascist Now? Labels and Policy Implications." *The Washington Quarterly* 45 (2): 149–68.

Discussion topic: Consider the following short piece by Vladislav Surkov. What are its core claims, and to what extent does it resonate with the different models of Russia's political regime presented in this week's readings?

Vladislav Surkov. 2019. "Putin's long-lasting state [Dolgoe Gosudarstvo Putina]." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 11. [on Brightspace]

Policy memo topic: What are the core factors sustaining Putin's regime in Russia, and to what extent are they durable?

Week 4 Jan 26 Elites and the bureaucracy

- *Maria Snegovaya and Kirill Petrov. 2022. “Long Soviet Shadows: The Nomenklatura Ties of Putin Elites.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 38 (4): 329–48.
- *Alena V. Ledeneva. 2013. “Russia’s Practical Norms and Informal Governance: The Origins of Endemic Corruption.” *Social Research* 80 (4): 1135–62.
- *Jussi Lassila. 2025. “Supporting the War in Ukraine Compared to the Annexation of Crimea in Russia’s Bureaucratic Texts.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 58 (2): 48–69.
- *Russia’s Wartime Technocrats, *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 329, 28 July 2025. (pp.2-16)

Discussion topic: Are elites in Russian officialdom motivated by a sense of duty, fear, desire for social advancement, or something else?

Policy memo topic: How is the composition of Russia’s elite changing after four years of war, and how might this affect the West’s relations with Russia?

Week 5 Feb 2 Domestic sources of war

- *Michael McFaul. 2020. “Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy.” *International Security* 45 (2): 95–139.
- *Henry E. Hale and Adam C. Lenton. 2024. “Do Autocrats Need a Foreign Enemy? Evidence from Fortress Russia.” *International Security* 49 (1): 9–50.
- *Marat Iliyasov and Yoshiko M. Herrera. 2024. “Russia’s War Strategy: What Chechnya Suggests for Ukraine.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 40 (5): 383–400.
- *Andrei P. Tsygankov. 2023. “Between War and Peace: Russian Visions of Future Relations with Ukraine and the West.” *Russian Politics* 8 (2): 230–46.

Discussion topic: What are the domestic political drivers of Russia’s war in Ukraine, and to what extent are they likely to change?

Policy memo topic: Are there still any ways that the international community can influence the perceived costs and benefits of war in Ukraine for Russia’s domestic politics?

PART II: EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY

Week 6 Feb 9 State-society relations

- * Robertson, Graeme, and Samuel Greene. 2017. "How Putin Wins Support." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (4): 86–100.
- * Forrat, Natalia. 2018. "Shock-Resistant Authoritarianism: Schoolteachers and Infrastructural State Capacity in Putin's Russia." *Comparative Politics* 50 (3): 417–49.
- * Jeremy Morris. "Russians in Wartime and Defensive Consolidation." *Current History* 121, no. 837 (2022): 258–63.
- * *Russian Analytical Digest*. 5 December 2025. No. 333: Perceptions and Experiences of War in Russia.

Discussion: What factors drive popular support for the government in Russia, and how has the war affected the nature of state-society relations?

Policy memo topic: When considering the effectiveness of policies aimed primarily at Russian elites (such as sanctions and visa bans), to what extent should Western policy-makers consider the impacts on state-society relations in Russia?

Week 7 Feb 23 Civic activism, protest, and dissent

- * Svetlana Erpyleva and Eeva Luhtakallio. 2024. "'The Climate Is Changing and the President Is Not': 'Non-Political' Climate Activism in Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 76 (6): 891–908.
- * Irina Meyer Olimpieva. 2025. "Silent Dissent: Exploring Russian Civic Activism as a Form of Opposition to the War in Ukraine." *Problems of Post-Communism* 72 (4): 369–77.
- * Elena Pavlova. 2025. "Knowledge Production and Resistance in Times of War: The Case of Russian Liberal Scholars." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, July 16, 1–15.
- * Marina Bezenkova. 2025. "The Defending 'Defenders': Framing Public Actions in Contemporary Russian Political Opportunity Structures." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, online ahead of print.

Discussion: Under what conditions is civic activism possible in today's Russia, and what are the constraints?

Policy memo topic: How can the international community support anti-war and opposition voices in Russia without exposing activists and dissenters to further risk?

RESEARCH ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE: FRIDAY, FEB. 27 @ 12 PM

Week 8 Mar 2 War-induced migration and diaspora networks

- *Margarita Zavadskaya. 2023. *The War-Induced Exodus from Russia*. FIIA Briefing Paper No. 358. Finnish Institute of International Affairs.
<https://www.fiiia.fi/en/publication/the-war-induced-exodus-from-russia>.
- **Russian Analytical Digest*. 10 September 2024. No. 316: Russian Opposition in Exile, Part 1: Internal Heterogeneity.
- *Olga Bronnikova, Sofia Gavrilova, and Tamara Margvelashvili. 2025. “Finding the Common Ground: Visibility, Cooperation and Tensions between Russian and Georgian Civil Society Initiatives in Tbilisi, 2023.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 72 (4): 378–90.
- *Susanne Bygnes. 2025. “Russians against the War (RAW): Diaspora Protest against the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine.” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, online ahead of print: 1–15.

Discussion: What are the common characteristics of the “*relokanty*” and what challenges have they faced in adjusting to life in exile?

Policy memo topic: Should the international community continue to support “*relokanty*” if the war ends, or should they be expected to return to Russia?

PART III: MANUFACTURING CONSENT

Week 9 Mar 9 Nationalism and patriotism

- *Helge Blakkisrud. 2023. “Russkii as the New Rossiiskii? Nation-Building in Russia After 1991.” *Nationalities Papers* 51 (1): 64–79.
- *Kolstø, Pål. 2023. “Ukrainians and Russians as ‘One People’: An Ideologeme and Its Genesis.” *Ethnopolitics* 24 (2): 139–158.
- *J. Paul Goode. 2016. “Love for the Motherland (or Why Cheese Is More Patriotic than Crimea).” *Russian Politics* 1 (4): 418–49.
- *Håvard Bækken. 2025. “Forging Frontline Russians: Militarized Patriotism and Identity Policy in the Occupied Donbas.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 58 (1): 28–52.

Discussion: In what ways is nation-building in Russia ambiguous, particularly in the relationship between nationalism and patriotism? Has the war in Ukraine clarified its nature?

Policy memo topic: What are likely to be the long-term consequences of the Kremlin’s investment in imperial nationalism and militarized patriotism for elite competition and state-society relations?

Week 10 Mar 16 Memory politics

*Jade McGlynn. 2023. *Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia*. Bloomsbury Academic. Ch.s 1-5 (pp.14-163) [e-book available]

Discussion: In what ways do the symbolic politics of memory manifest in the “real politics” of political competition and policy-making in Russia?

Policy memo topic: How important are memory politics to societal cohesion in Russia? Are there points of tension particularly around commemoration of the Great Patriotic War in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine?

Week 11 Mar 23 Media and propaganda

*Anton Shirikov. 2024. “Rethinking Propaganda: How State Media Build Trust through Belief Affirmation.” *The Journal of Politics* 86 (4): 1319–32.

*Vera Tolz and Stephen Hutchings. 2023. “Truth with a Z: Disinformation, War in Ukraine, and Russia’s Contradictory Discourse of Imperial Identity.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (5): 347–65.

*Daria Blinova. 2025. “Priming with Fear: Putin’s Manipulation of Domestic Public Support.” *Russian Politics* 10 (1): 121–64.

*J. Paul Goode. 2025. “Russian Propaganda from V to Z: Projecting Banal and Everyday Nationalism in Unsettled Times.” *Nationalities Papers*, online ahead of print, 1–21.

Discussion: In what ways do national media strengthen or weaken popular support for government and war in Russia?

Policy memo topic: What are the available means (if any) to challenge the effectiveness of Russia’s domestic propaganda from outside the country?

Week 12 Mar 30 Education and youth

- *Dima Kortukov and Julian G. Waller. 2025. “The Foundations of Russian Statehood: The Pentabasis, National History, and Civic Values in Wartime Russia.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 58 (2): 1–27.
- *Ivan Posylnyi. 2024. “The Soviet Pillar of Belonging: How Donbas Schools Construct the Reality in Occupation.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 57 (2): 112–34.
- *Ian Garner and Allyson Edwards. 2025. “Creating Good Young Patriots: Russian Youth Leaders on Telegram and the War against Ukraine.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, May 21, 1–24.
- *Valentina Feklyunina, Samuel Robertshaw, and James Bilsland. 2025. “Militarization of History and Mnemonic Habits in Putin’s Russia: Pedagogy of War.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 41 (3): 181–98.

Discussion: How do the state’s education and youth policies construct identity and citizenship, particularly in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine?

Policy memo topic: What are likely to be the long-term effects of the Kremlin’s education and youth policies for elite recruitment and social mobility in Russia?

RESEARCH ESSAY DUE: FRIDAY, APR 3 @ 12 PM

PART IV: WHAT FUTURE FOR RUSSIAN STUDIES?

Week 13 Apr 6

- *Vladimir Gel’man. 2023. “Exogenous Shock and Russian Studies.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (1–2): 1–9.
- *Margarita Zavadskaya and Theodore Gerber. 2023. “Rise and Fall: Social Science in Russia before and after the War.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (1–2): 108–20.
- *Lanabi La Lova. 2023. “Methods in Russian Studies: Overview of Top Political Science, Economics, and Area Studies Journals.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (1–2): 27–37.

APPENDIX

Statement on Student Mental Health:

As a University student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please see: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Academic Accommodations

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the *Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances*, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (students.carleton.ca/course-outline).

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor.

The Associate Dean of the Faculty follows a rigorous [process for academic integrity allegations](#), including reviewing documents and interviewing the student, when an instructor suspects a violation has been committed. Penalties for violations may include a final grade of “F” for the course.

Policy on Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Written Assignments:

- Students are prohibited from using generative artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) to compose any of their written assignments for this course (including drafts and the final version). By submitting written work in this course, you are agreeing that you are the author, not any third party (including AI).
- Submitting AI generated papers is a violation of the university's academic integrity policy and will be referred to the appropriate dean for investigation and potential penalties (see academic integrity policy below).
- Please note, as AI is increasingly integrated into many word processors and programs for spell-check, grammar correction, or translations (google translate, Deep L), use of these resources is permitted as *aids* in writing assignments. You can also use AI to brainstorm or as a study aide. What is NOT permitted is asking a generative AI to write any part or your whole paper for you. If using AI, use it responsibly and ethically.

Why the Prohibition?

- A key aim of this course is for you to develop your critical thinking, interpretative, and writing skills. You can only develop those skills if you do your own critical thinking, interpretation, and writing.
- Generative AI is NOT A RELIABLE SOURCE of information. Most generative AIs are trained based on internet data that is often inaccurate and unreliable and often contains implicit biases. Because generative AI produces text based on probabilistic models, it will often make up information and/or cite sources that simply do not exist. This makes it a highly unreliable source for the writing of academic essays. In evaluating your essays, the quality and appropriateness of your source material will be assessed.
- Students suspected of using AI in their work in a manner that violates this policy may be asked to provide the instructor with their research notes and drafts of their essay. They may also be asked to meet with the instructor to discuss the assignment and the research materials consulted.

Self-Plagiarism:

Students may not re-use their own work from a different course or assignment without the permission of the instructor(s). Please note that given the workshop format of this course, this prohibition does not apply to draft materials or sections taken from interim assignments for the course that are reused in the complete version of the proposal.

Intellectual Property: Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s). Students are not allowed to film or record in class sessions without the permission of the instructor. The dissemination of recordings of any kind made in the classroom is strictly prohibited.

Approval of final grades: Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Carleton E-mail Accounts: All email communication to students from BGInS will be via official Carleton university e-mail accounts and/or Brightspace. As important course and University information is distributed this way, it is the student's responsibility to monitor their Carleton and Brightspace accounts.