

Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Course:	MA (PISM)
Course Code:	IS 514N
Course Title:	Russian Political System
Course Type:	Optional
Course Duration:	One Semester
Semester:	Winter
Course Teachers:	Prof. Archana Upadhyay & Dr. Dinesh Kumar
Instruction Method:	Lectures/Tutorials/Seminars
Evaluation:	Class performance/ assignments/ End-Semester Exam
Credits:	Four
Contact Hours:	Four hours per week

Course Description and Objectives

The Course offers an introduction to the evolution of contemporary Russian politics through the understanding of Russian political, social and economic history, current developments and ongoing policy challenges contextualised by relevant theoretical literature. Students will get insights into the complex issues and chain of events that have come to define contemporary Russian politics beginning in the late Soviet period and running through the present times. The Course will cover policy and empirical challenges ranging from political and economic dislocations of post-communist transition to its transformation from its early post-Soviet semi-presidential system to its current form characterised by a strong presidential system.

Principal political institutions of the Russian state will be analysed through the lens of comparative political science looking not only at the formal framework, but also on the actual performance of actors and institutions, that have evolved in Russia since the early 1990s. The Course will also highlight the role of political culture, civil society,

private enterprise and collective action in influencing the course of contemporary Russian politics. The primacy of the state, the importance of the ‘West’ and the impact of the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union on contemporary Russian politics will also be analysed.

The Course aims to acquaint students with the main institutions, events and actors of contemporary Russian politics and equip them with the basic skills of its interpretation and analysis.

Learning Outcomes:

Towards the end of the Course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the trends and events in Russian politics through the comprehension of important social-scientific concepts, approaches and theories.
2. Analyze and comprehend Russia’s political system and key forces in contemporary Russian politics.
3. Apply the understanding of Russian politics to engage with broader debates in political science.
4. Use relevant frameworks to interpret real-world political developments in Russia.

Evaluation Methods

- Mid-semester evaluation (50%)
 - Assignments & class performance – 30%
 - Term paper – 20%
- End-semester evaluation (50%)
 - End Semester Examination – 50 %

• The SIS Research Manual should be used as a guide for written assignments. Available at https://www.jnu.ac.in/sites/default/files/SIS_Research_Manual_0.pdf Students must maintain a high degree of academic integrity, which includes abstaining from copying and plagiarism. For details on plagiarism and research ethics, refer to SIS Research Manual

Course Outline

Unit1: From USSR to the Russian Federation

This unit provides an overview of Russia's political and social landscape and its transition from Soviet to post-Soviet Russia (1985-the 1990s). The Unit will include:

- Approaches to the study of Russian politics
- Transition within the Soviet framework - Gorbachev's reforms
- The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Russian Federation
- The Constitution of 1993

Unit II: Institutional power structure and processes

This Unit will cover the key institutions and structures of governance, political parties, electoral engagement and constitutional reforms. The Unit will include:

- Presidency and the executive branch
- Legislative branch of power in Russia
- The Judicial Branch and Justice Administration
- Political parties; Elections and electoral engagement
- Russian model of Federalism: the Centre and the regions
- Constitutional reforms of 2022

Unit III: Checks and balances

This Unit will discuss the checks and balances to state power within the Russian political system. The role of social movements, civil society, media and other 'agents of change' will be looked at. The Unit will include:

- Russia as a constitutional democracy
- Civil Society in Russia
- 'Agents of change'; dominant groups, government and private enterprise
- Social movements and protests; public opinion
- Press: print, visual and social media

Unit IV: Political Culture and political subcultures in Russia

This Unit will highlight the ideological roots of Russia's political culture, its actors, institutions and societal relevance, and its interaction with politics. The role of personalities, the church and the impact of informal political arrangements on contemporary politics will also be discussed. The Unit will include:

- Political culture in Russia; Competing interpretations
- Change and continuity

- Personality centric politics
- Religion and the State
- Ethnic Groups and Migrants

Unit V: Political Discourses in Contemporary Russia

This Unit will discuss the ongoing political debates in Russia and its impact on the course of Russian politics. The Unit will include:

- Nationalism and Identity discourse
- Eurasianism and Neo-Eurasianism
- Sovereign Democracy
- Centralized-state and the politics of stability
- Post-Soviet to Greater Eurasia

Reading List

Essential Readings for a comprehensive background

Henderson, Jane (2022). *The Constitution of the Russian Federation, A Contextual Analysis*, Hart Publishing: UK

Robinson, N. (2018). *Contemporary Russian Politics, An Introduction*, Polity Press: New York

Sakwa, Richard (2023). *Advanced Introduction to Russian Politics*, Edward Elgar: UK

Shirayev, Eric (2025). *Russian Government and Politics*, Bloomsbury Academic: Bloomsbury Publishing

Taylor, Brain.D. (2024). *Russian Politics, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press

Unit wise Essential Readings

Unit 1: From USSR to the Russian Federation

Sakwa, Richard (2021), *Russian Politics and Society*, 5th ed., Routledge, Chapter 1, pp. 1-39, Chapter 2 &3, pp. 40-85.

Kotkin, Stephen (2008), *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, Oxford University Press, Ch. 2, pp. 49-54, Chapter 6-8, pp. 245-312.

Chenoy, Anuradha & Kumar, Rajan (2017), *Re-emerging Russia: Structures, Institutions and Processes*, Berlin: Springer, Chapter 1, pp. 1-25, Chapter 2, pp. 27-40.

Sakwa Richard (1995), "The Russian Elections of December 1993," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 2 (1995): 195-227.

White, Stephen, Rita Di Leo & Ottorino Cappelli (eds) (1993), *The Soviet Transition: From Gorbachev to Yeltsin*, Psychology Press, (reprinted 2014), Stephen White "Towards democratic transition" pp.18-40 and Leon Gudkov "The Disintegration of the USSR and Russians", pp. 75-108.

Dallin, Alexander (1992), "Causes of the Collapse of the USSR," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 8 (4):279-302.

Danilenko, Gennady M. (1994), "The New Russian Constitution and International Law," *American Journal of International Law*, 88, no. 3 (July 1994): 451-470.

Unit II: Institutional Power Structure and Leadership

Kelley R. Donald (2016), *Russian Politics and Presidential Power: Transformational leadership from Gorbachev to Putin*, CQ Press, Chapter 1, Executive Power in Russian Politics, pp. 1-23.

Chenoy, Anuradha & Kumar, Rajan (2017), *Re-emerging Russia: Structures, Institutions and Processes*, Berlin: Springer. Chapter 3, 4 &5, pp. 41-151.

Sakwa, Richard (2020), *Russian Politics and Society*, 5th ed., Routledge, Chapter 7, 8,9 and 10, pp. 181-308, Chapter 12 & 13, pp. 340-407.

Henderson, Jane (2011), *The Constitution of the Russian Federation: A Contextual Analysis*, Oxford: Hart Publishing, Sec. III, pp. 130-142.

Krol, Gerrit (2021), "The Legislative Role of the Russian Duma....," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 37, no.6:, pp. 559-577.

Oracheva, Oksana, (ed.) (2004), “The dilemmas of federalism: Moscow and the regions in the Russian Federation.” *In Restructuring Post-Communist Russia*, CUP: Cambridge, pp. 181-207.

Bartlett, William (2021). “Russia’s 2020 Constitutional Amendments: *A Comparative Analysis*”, *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies*, Volume 23, December 2021, pp. 311-342.

Shaikhutdinova, Gulnara R. (2020), *Contemporary Russian Federalism: Delimitation of Jurisdictional Subjects and Powers*, The Hague: T.M.C. Asser, Chaps. 2 & 4 pp. 7-31, 47-55.

Gel’man, Vladimir et al (2021), “Russia’s 2020 Constitutional Reform: The Politics of Institutionalizing the Status-Quo,” *Russian Politics*, Brill.

Sakwa, Richard, (2024), *Advanced Introduction to Russian Politics*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Chapter 4, pp. 58-73.

Unit III: Checks and Balances

Medushevskiy, Andreï (2019), “Russian Constitutional Development: Formal and Informal Practices,” *BRICS Law Journal* 6, no. 3 (2019): 100-127.

Trochev, Alexei (2018), “Authoritarian constitutionalism in Putin’s Russia...” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 51, no. 3: 201-214.

Melnikov N.N. (2025), Formation of Civil Society as a Problem of Russian civilization: A Combination of Traditions and Modern Values // Sociopolitical Sciences. - 2025. - Vol. 15. - N. 1. - P. 134-138. doi: 10.33693/2223-0092-2025-15-1-134-138

Sakwa, Richard (2020), *Russian Politics and Society*, 5th ed. London: Routledge, Chapter 5, pp. 113-152, Chapter 15, pp. 448-485.

Stuvoy, Kirsti (2020), “ ‘The Foreign Within’: State-Civil Society Relations in Russia”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 13 May, 2020, pp 1103-1124.

Markus, S. (2022), *Russia’s Oligarchs* in S. A. Wengle (Ed.), *Russian Politics Today: Stability and Fragility*, pp. 270-92, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Unit IV: Political Culture and Political Subculture in Russia

Ryazanov, A.V. & Morokhova E. I. (2020), "The Russian Political Culture: Dynamics and Trends" *Social Philosophy*, Volume 13. Issue 1

<https://doi.org/10.30853/manuscript.2020.1.31>.

Blakkisrud, Helge & Kolstø, Pål (eds.) (2025), *Political Legitimacy and Traditional Values in Putin's Russia*, Edinburg University Press: Edinburg, pp. 1-100.

Alexander, J. (2000), *Political Culture in Post-Communist Russia: Formlessness and Recreation in a Traumatic Transition*, Palgrave Macmillan, Chapter 1, pp. 1-26, Chapter 5, pp. 68-115.

Tucker, Robert C. (Ed) (1971) *The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change*, Norton, Chapter. 9, pp. 207-225.

Novruzov, Samir (2024), "Vladimir Putin's Leadership: Charisma, Power Dynamics, and Influence through the Lens of Leadership Traits and Theoretical Perspectives," *Open Journal of Leadership*, 13, no. 3, 2024, pp. 217-233.

Green, Christian.M (2025). "Religion and State in Russia: Introduction", *Journal of Law and Religion*, Cambridge University Press, 9 June 2025, pp.1-6.

Upadhyay, Archana (2018), "Religion and Religiosity in Russia: An Overview", *International Studies*, 53(3-4),JNU:Sage Publication,pp. 195-209.

Köllner, Tobias (2022), *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Russia*, Routledge, Chapter 1, pp. 1-31.

Aktürk, Ş. (2022), "Ethnicity and Religion in Russia". In S. A. Wengle (Ed.), *Russian Politics Today: Stability and Fragility*, pp. 482-505. Chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leykin,Inna and Anastasia Gorodzeisky (2024). "Post-Soviet Russia: anti-immigrant sentiment and discourses of national identity". In Michaels Samers and Jens Rydgren (Eds.) *Migration and Nationalism*, Political Science and Public Policy Collection, Edward Elgar Publishing, Chapter 5, pp. 88-113

Unit V: Political Discourses in Contemporary Russia

Kolstø, Pål & Blakkisrud, Helge (eds.) (2016), *The New Russian Nationalism*, Edinburgh UP, Introduction, pp. 1-17.

Sakwa, Richard (2020), *Russian Politics and Society*, 5th ed., Routledge, Chapter 11, pp. 309-339.

Panov, Petr (2010), "Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Russia" *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 1, no. 2, pp. 85-94.

Dugin, Aleksandr (2014), "Eurasianism". In John B. Morgan, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*, Arktos Media: London pp. 17-100.

Greenfeld, Liah (1990), "The Formation of the Russian National Identity" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 3, pp. 549-591.

Morris, Sean, P (2018). " 'Sovereign Democracy' and International law: Legitimation and Legal Ideology" in Sean Morris (ed.) *Russian Discourses on International Law*, Routledge: New York, Chapter 5.

Wengle, S. A. (2022), "Stability and Fragility in Contemporary Russian Politics", in S. A. Wengle (Ed.), *Russian Politics Today: Stability and Fragility*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-30.

Lewis, D. G. (2018), "Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of 'Greater Eurasia'", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(10), 1612-1637. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1515348>.

Grachev, Bogdan V. (2023). "Essential characteristics of Greater Eurasia" *Civilisation Studies Review* 5, no.1, pp. 47-66

Karaganov, S (2017). "From Eastward Pivot to Greater Eurasia" , *International Affairs* 62, no 4, pp, 1-124

Kovalyov, V (2023). "Building a just World Order in Greater Eurasia", *International Affairs* 69, no 002, pp. 88-96

Additional readings :

Gill Graeme, (2025) (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*, Routledge; 2nd edition, Routledge.

Remington, Thomas F. (2018), *Politics in Russia*, Routledge: New York.

Sakwa, Richard (2014), *Putin and Oligarch: The Khodorkovsky-Yukos Affair*, I. B. Tauris: London.

- Chenoy, Anuradha & Kumar, Rajan (2017), *Re-emerging Russia: Structures, Institutions and Processes*, Berlin: Springer.
- Dugin, Aleksandr (1997), *Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*, Arktogetja.
- Chaisty, P., & Whitefield, S. (2025), *How Russians Understand the New Russia*, Princeton University Press.
- Hale, H. E. (Ed.), (2024), *Developments in Russian Politics*, Bloomsbury.
- Sakwa, Richard (2020), *Russian Politics and Society*, 5th ed. London: Routledge,
- Treisman, Daniel, (ed) (2018), *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin's Russia*, Brookings Institution Press.
- White, Stephen (2017), *Understanding Russian Politics*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Kelley R. Donald (2016), *Russian Politics and Presidential Power: Transformational leadership from Gorbachev to Putin*, CQ Press.
- Gel'man, Vladimir (2015), *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes*, University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Sharafutdinova, G. (2023), *The Afterlife of the 'Soviet Man': Rethinking Homo Sovieticus*, Bloomsbury.