

INST 4850.002/PSCI 3700.001 POLITICS OF RUSSIA SEMINAR

Dr. Dariga Abilova, *she/her*

Class time: MW 7PM – 8:20PM in Wooten 112

Office Hours: Thursdays 1PM – 2:30PM or by appointment

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Course Description

This is an in-person semester-long course, which provides a detailed introduction to the modern Russian politics. Russia is the largest country on Earth by territory, a successor state of USSR and a key geopolitical player in Eurasia and the world. This class primarily focuses on the country's domestic politics, although topics in foreign politics that affected the domestic politics, will be also given attention. Even though Russia took a course towards democratization in 1991, after the USSR's break-up, it remains to be a politically repressive regime, with numerous instances of human rights violations. After two devastating Chechen Wars in the mid-1990s, the Russians enjoyed a relatively stable decade of economic growth and stability, until The 2014 Annexation of Crimea and the following invasion in Ukraine. To understand the shift in the Russian foreign policy, which was partly caused by domestic problems, we will investigate current regime's political interests, economic miscalculations, and geopolitical concerns. From 2014, the country is also engaged in intense cyberwarfare and media-warfare to legitimate its controversial policies domestically and abroad. The course will start with Boris Yeltsin's departure from presidency and continue into current political system under Vladimir Putin's leadership and conclude with the study of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Course objectives

This course features discussions of violence, exploitation of humans, and other disturbing topics. Some content may be distressing or triggering to individuals who have experienced trauma. Please take care while engaging with the material and seek support if needed.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Understand broader forces that shape modern Russia's politics, economy and society.
2. Make sophisticated inferences about Russia's domestic and foreign policies and their global impact.
3. Engage with selected scholarship on the evolution of the current Russian political leadership and popular support for it.
4. Analyze similar political regimes in Eurasia and predict their future developments.

Required Materials

1. In-class lectures
2. Assigned readings, such as book chapters or articles posted on Canvas
3. Additional media and reading materials that will be posted on Canvas

This course has digital components! To fully participate in this class, you will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. The University is committed to providing a reliable online course system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty which prevents students from completing a time sensitive assessment activity, I will extend the time windows and provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Please immediately report any technical problems that are preventing you from

accessing the course and contact the UNT Student Help Desk: helpdesk@unt.edu or 940.565.2324 and obtain a ticket number.

How to Succeed in this Course

You should be prepared for a bigger reading load and more challenging assignments in this course. If you complete all readings and assignments on time - *you will succeed in this class*. The schedule and policies in this syllabus are all designed with the purpose of giving you the tools you need to succeed. Every deadline is in place to support your pacing. Every grading policy is there to encourage and reward you for working up to your own high standards.

If you are struggling for any reason please send me an email, text me on MS Teams or come by my office. I want to hear what you're experiencing with the class, and we will work together to fix it. Depending on your struggle, there might be immediate help from UNT's Office of Disability Accommodation and/or a medical note from a counselor or therapist that will authorize me to accommodate your needs. If your struggle doesn't match either of these, we will work to find another solution.

I am generally strict about enforcing everything in this syllabus because that strictness usually helps my students achieve their goals and they thank me later for the tough love. If for any reason you fall off the train and feel unable to catch up, reach out to me right away and we'll get you back on board!

Academic Integrity:

We will have written assignments in the class. I am a big believer that each one of you is more than capable of coming up with your own original thoughts. And if you happen to agree with someone else's – that is fine, too, but you always need to give credits to the creators. Stealing someone else's hard work or failing to give proper credits to respective authors will never help to pass the assignments and goes against the university's policy on academic integrity.

Academic integrity emanates from a culture that embraces the core values of trust and honesty necessary for full learning to occur. As a student-centered public research university, the University of North Texas promotes the integrity of the learning process by establishing and enforcing academic standards. Academic dishonesty breaches the mutual trust necessary in an academic environment and undermines all scholarship. The Student Standards of Academic Integrity are based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. ([UNT Policy 18.1.16 \[EXT LINK\]](#)).

Acts academic dishonesty include cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, forgery, sabotage of other's works, self-plagiarism, team plagiarism and patch-writing plagiarism ([UNT Policy 18.1.16 \[EXT LINK\]](#)). Any attempt to engage in academic dishonesty will result in receiving zero for the assigned items and may get reported to the Dean of Students.

You can use spellchecking tools like Grammarly to proofread your original writing. However, the use of any content-producing application, such as ChatGPT, will result in an automatic zero for the assignment. In other words, you must write all your assignments yourself and you can only use AI for editing and checking for misspellings.

If you would like assistance with translating your ideas into academic writing, or just want to refresh your knowledge about proper citation mechanisms (so that you can give proper credits to authors), consider visiting the UNT's Writing Studio. Also, check [these very helpful handouts on the Writing Center \[EXT LINK\]](#), which can help you with organizing and citing your academic papers.

ADA accommodation statement:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access \[EXT LINK\]](#) website. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Word on Communication:

For this course, I will check my email at least once per day during regular business hours, so please remember that you will not necessarily receive an instant reply from me, but I will answer your email within 48 hours. Make sure that you only use your UNT email when contacting me. When emailing me, please identify yourself by giving me your entire name, the class you are in, and your specific question. *Try to be very specific with your questions, as the more specific you are, the better I will be able to answer your question!*

Learning Environment

I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and belonging. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable. Likewise, when others critique your points, don't take them personally but think about what about your and others' arguments could be presented in a more persuasive manner. Remember, you can disagree without becoming disagreeable and in addressing disagreements you will help your own and the class's learning. In return for your thoughtful engagement with the material and each other, I will work to provide a learning environment that allows you to take intellectual and emotional risks. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together.

Every student in this class should have the right to learn and engage within an environment of respect and courtesy from others. We will discuss our classroom's habits of engagement and I also encourage you to review UNT's student [Code of Conduct \[EXT LINK\]](#) so that we can all start with the same baseline civility understanding.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004):

UNT prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex,

sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Attendance

Attendance Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be succeed in it. You should attend every class unless you have a university excused absence such as active military service, a religious holy day, or an official university function as stated in the [Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy \(PDF\)](#).

If you cannot attend a class due to an emergency, please let me know. Your safety and well-being are important! Also, UNT will notify through Eagle Alert of any emergencies or if there is a campus closing that will impact a class in accordance with the [Emergency Notifications \[EXT LINK\]](#). Please try to arrive before class begins to find a seat, prepare your materials, and connect with your peers. Because this course involves collaboration, participation is essential to everyone's learning. Our in-class activities require you to be actively engaged in discussions and group work. The beginning of class is especially critical—just like the beginning of a movie or book. Being late to class is sometimes inevitable. **If you are late, know that you are welcome to join the class, but please do so without distracting others.**

Grading

A	B	C	D	F
90-99%	80-90%	70-80%	60-70%	0-60%

Grades are never rounded up. For example, if you have earned 89.99%, your grade is B+.

Late work is not accepted unless there is a valid documented reason for missing the original deadline. Also, if you have an important life event, or an emergency, or any other situation that is preventing you from submitting the work on time – please let me know as soon as possible. I reserve the right to reject last minute requests for deadline extensions without any proper documentation.

In the interest of academic fairness, all students are graded on same criteria for each assignment. Personal desires or needs to maintain a particular GPA for scholarships, athletics, or other reasons cannot be considered in grading the submitted material.

If you believe that the grade assigned should be reviewed again, I am more than happy to take another look. However, a granted grade review will require a full re-grade of the entire work and may discover that certain portions were graded too leniently.

Graded Assignments

Attendance and Participation – 15%

Throughout the semester, learners will be expected and required to attend every class and to be actively engaged in class as a member of the learning community for this course.

Please remember that your attendance is necessary to engage with your classmates, to critically

analyze the material, to express your opinions and to help each other learn. Attending every class is going to be the easiest grade to earn. All you need to do is show up to the class during the 16-week (sans Thanksgiving week) semester and earn 0.5 points for every attendance towards your final 15 points.

Short Critical Reflection – 15%

During Week 8, you will write and submit a short paper analyzing the elements of state propaganda in few news articles covering the same topic. The news articles will be from both Russian and non-Russian news agencies, and your task is to critically analyze the rhetoric of the coverage. The essay should be between 2-4 pages. The detailed instructions and relevant articles will be posted on Canvas.

Midterm – 30%

During Week 10, you will complete a midterm in class. The exam will contain three short essay questions, and you will have an entire class period to write your responses. You will be graded on the quality of your arguments, and your ability to use concepts and materials learned in the class to support them. The exam will be open-book and you can bring your notes. We will have a review session in class to prepare for the midterm.

Movie Discussion Assignment - 10%

On week 12, we will watch the Documentary in class. After watching it, you will be given one week to write your reflection on it and submit it on Canvas. Prompting questions will be posted on Canvas.

Final Exam – 30%

During the last week of the semester, we will have a final exam in-class. The exam will be open-book and you can bring your notes. The exam will contain three short essay questions, and you will have an entire class period to write your responses. You will be graded on the quality of your arguments, and your ability to use concepts and materials learned in the class to support them. We will have a review session on preceding Tuesday to prepare for the final exam.

Course Schedule

** Even though there are two class sessions in one week, and we may leave some readings for the second session – you should still try to read all the readings before their respective weeks.*

Week 1	Intro to the Class Walt, S. M. (1998). International relations: One world, many theories. Foreign policy, 29-46.
Week 2	End of History, end of “Communism” - Dyson, S. B. (2015). Constructing international relations. In <i>Otherworldly politics: The international relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica</i> (pp. 75–94). Johns Hopkins University Press. - Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? The National Interest, (16), 3–18.

	Mearsheimer, J.J. (2019). Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order. <i>International Security</i> 43(4), 7-50.
Week 3	The Collapse of USSR's Centralized Authority - Pannier, B. (2006). Kazakhstan: Zheltoqsan protest marked 20 years later. <i>RFE/RL</i>. "What now for the Soviet Union?" (1991, January 17). <i>Nature</i>, 349, 181. - Tuminez, A. S. (2003). Nationalism, ethnic pressures, and the breakup of the Soviet Union. <i>Journal of Cold War Studies</i>, 5(4), 81–136.
Week 4	Shock Therapy and the First Chechen War - Huygen, C. (2011). One step forward, two steps back: Boris Yeltsin and the failure of shock therapy. <i>Constellations</i>, 3(1). 1999 Russian apartment bombings: Why doesn't anyone believe Putin's version? [Youtube Video].
Week 5	Second Chechen War - Pain, E. (2001). From the First Chechen War towards the Second. <i>The Brown Journal of World Affairs</i>, 8(1), 7–19. "The succession struggle in Russia." (1999). <i>Strategic Comments</i>, 5(7), 1–2. - Dubnov, V. (2016, October 27). Chechnya's new contract with the Kremlin. Carnegie Moscow Center.
Week 6	Imperialism - Nodia, G. (2009). The wounds of lost empire. <i>Journal of Democracy</i>, 20(12), 34–38. - Treisman, D. (2007). Putin's silovarchs. <i>Orbis</i>, 51(1), 141–153. - Kolstø, P., & Kolov, B. (2024). The religious component in contemporary Russian imperialism. <i>Religions</i>, 15(9), 1138. - Why do young people in Russia love the USSR? [Youtube Video].
Week 7	Putin's 2012 Return - Rogov, K. (2018, August). Administrative mobilization and the dynamics of electoral manipulations on Putin's presidential election. <i>PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 537</i>. - Frye, T., Reuter, O. J., & Szakonyi, D. (2019). Hitting them with carrots: Voter intimidation and vote buying in Russia. <i>British Journal of Political Science</i>, 49(3), 857–882. - Gel'man, V. (2015). The politics of fear. <i>Russian Politics and Law</i>, 53(5–6), 6–26.
Week 8	The Euro-Maidan and The Annexation of Crimea - Schindlin, D. (2016). Phantom referendums in phantom states: Meaningless farce or a bridge to reality? In <i>Nationalism, referendums and democracy</i> (pp. 75–98). Routledge. - Bechev, D. (2015). Understanding the contest between the EU and Russia in their shared neighborhood. <i>Problems of Post-Communism</i>, 62(6), 340–349.

	Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: The liberal delusions that provoked Putin. <i>Foreign Affairs</i>, 93, 77–89. Short Critical Reflection DUE
Week 9	Looking East: Russia in BRICS, Syrian Conflict and Belt & Road - Timofeev, I., Lissovolik, Y., & Filippova, L. (2017). Russia's vision of the Belt and Road Initiative: From the rivalry of the great powers to forging a new cooperation model in Eurasia. <i>China & World Economy</i>, 25(5), 62–77. - Kofman, M., & Rojansky, M. (2018). What kind of victory for Russia in Syria? <i>Military Review</i>, 24(2), 6–23. - Laruelle, M. (2004). The two faces of contemporary Eurasianism: An imperial version of Russian nationalism. <i>Nationalities Papers</i>, 32(1), 115–136.
Week 10	Midterm Week Monday: Review Wednesday: Midterm in class
Week 11	Russian Arctic Buchanan, E. (2023). <i>Red Arctic: Russian strategy under Putin</i>. Brookings Institution Press. Chapter 3, "Putin's Arctic Playbook."
Week 12	"Tightening the Screws" - Worden, M. (2018, July 13). Russia's bloody World Cup. <i>Politico</i>. - Kazun, A., & Semykina, K. (2020). Presidential elections 2018: The struggle of Putin and Navalny for a media agenda. <i>Problems of Post-Communism</i>, 67(6), 455–466. - Hutcheson, D. S., & McAllister, I. (2021). Consolidating the putin regime: The 2020 referendum on Russia's constitutional amendments. <i>Russian Politics</i>, 6(3), 355–376. - Roher, D. (Director). (2022). <i>Navalny</i> [Film]. CNN Films; HBO Max. Movie Discussion Assignment DUE
Week 13	Propaganda, Kremlin "Pool" and Media Warfare - Laruelle, M. (2014). The "Russian idea" on the small screen: Staging national identity on Russia's TV. <i>Demokratizatsiya</i>, 22(2), 313–333. - Crilley, R., et al. (2022). Understanding RT's audiences: Exposure not endorsement for Twitter followers of Russian state-sponsored media. <i>The International Journal of Press/Politics</i>, 27(1), 220–242. - Kachkayeva, A., Lipman, M., & Poyker, M. (2018). Media in Russia: Between modernization and monopoly. In D. Treisman (Ed.), <i>The new autocracy: Information, politics, and policy in Putin's Russia</i> (pp. 159–190). Brookings Institution Press.

Week 14	The Russo-Ukrainian Conflict (2022 -) - Izzeldin, M., Muradoğlu, Y. G., Pappas, V., Petropoulou, A., & Sivaprasad, S. (2023). The impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on global financial markets. <i>International Review of Financial Analysis</i>, 87, 102598. - Krajczár, G. (2024). The Russia-Ukraine war and China: Neutrality with imperial characteristics. In B. Madlovics & B. Magyar (Eds.), <i>Russia's imperial endeavor and its geopolitical consequences: The Russia-Ukraine war</i> (Vol. 2). Academic Studies Press. - Schultz, K. A. (2025). Holding the world together? The future of territorial order. <i>International Organization</i>, 79(S1), S209–S223.
Week 15	Thanksgiving Break, no classes
Week 16	Finals Week Monday: Review Wednesday: Final Exam in class

* PLEASE NOTE: I reserve a right to make amendments to this schedule and should they become necessary – you will be notified well ahead of any deadlines.

Additional UNT Policies

Retention of Student Records:

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See [UNT Records Management and Retention Policy \[EXT LINK\]](#) for additional information.

Access to Information - Eagle Connect:

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: my.unt.edu. All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail Eagle Connect (<https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect>).

Student Evaluation Administration Dates:

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13-15 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should

look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey, they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the [SPOT website \[EXT LINK\]](#) or email spot@unt.edu.

Survivor Advocacy:

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-5652648.

Use of Student Work:

A student owns the copyright for all work (e.g. software, photographs, reports, presentations, and email postings) he or she creates within a class and the University is not entitled to use any student work without the student's permission unless all of the following criteria are met:

- The work is used only once.
- The work is not used in its entirety.
- Use of the work does not affect any potential profits from the work.
- The student is not identified.
- The work is identified as student work.

If the use of the work does not meet all of the above criteria, then the University office or department using the work must obtain the student's written permission.

Transmission and Recording of Student Images in Electronically Delivered Courses:

No permission is needed from a student for his or her image or voice to be transmitted live via videoconference or streaming media, but all students should be informed when courses are to be conducted using either method of delivery. No notification is needed if only audio and slide capture is used or if the video only records the instructor's image.

Student Support Services:

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Services \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Care Team \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Individual Counseling \[EXT LINK\]](#)

Additional Student Support Services:

- [Registrar \[EXT LINK\]](#)

- [Financial Aid \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Student Legal Services \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Career Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Food Pantry \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Academic Resource Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Academic Success Center \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [UNT Libraries \[EXT LINK\]](#)
- [Writing Lab \[EXT LINK\]](#)