

Harvard University Department of Economics, Spring 2021

Economics 1025: From Gorbachev to Putin: The Economics and Politics of the Russian Transition

Syllabus

Synchronous Classes on Zoom: Tue/Thu 1:30-2:45pm

Instructor: Maxim Boycko boycko@fas.harvard.edu

Teaching Assistant: Natalka Bowley natalkabowley@college.harvard.edu

Canvas Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/84588>

Office Hours: By appointment, please email to book

Course Description

The course covers the transformation of Russia from “mature socialism” of the early days of Mikhail Gorbachev to the present-day mix of market economics and authoritarian politics under Vladimir Putin. After introducing the basic concepts of capitalism, socialism, and transition the course focuses on Russia’s key economic and political reforms. Additional topics include Russian economic growth, oligarchs, corruption, the energy sector, and Putin’s foreign policy. Students will have reading assignments twice a week, participate in classroom discussions, make an oral presentation, prepare an empirical note, and take the final exam. Class time will be devoted to a mix of lectures, discussions, and student presentations.

Economics 1025 fulfils the writing requirement for economics concentrators.

Prerequisites

Introductory economics (Ec10a, Ec10b or equivalents), introductory statistics (Stat104 or equivalent).

Requirements and Grading

Class Participation (12%) Zoom classes are synchronous and attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to actively participate in classroom discussions and will be prompted to open debates on specific topics.

Reading Assignments (24%) Required readings for each class are the basis of the course. Twice a week, students will prepare brief reading responses and email them to the instructor by midnight before the day of the class.

Oral Presentation (12%) Each student will prepare and deliver one presentation in class – either individually or as part of a study group (see below) – on a topic related to Russia or a former Soviet Bloc country. Presentation prospectus, with preliminary central thesis and a list of sources, should be emailed to the instructor for approval by 3/15.

Empirical Note (12%) Students will prepare a brief empirical note analyzing aggregate output dynamics during transition in one of the former Soviet Bloc countries.

Final Exam (40%) will be of the short answer/short essay format.

The Final Grade: the weights of individual components are above. *Reading Assignments* and *Class Participation* will be graded weekly on “check/check plus/check minus” basis.

Main Readings

The two main books used throughout the course are:

- Anders Aslund (2013): *How Capitalism Was Built*
- Daniel Treisman (2011): *The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev*, The Free Press.

You will have to buy or rent them from amazon.com, ebay.com or other sources.

Additionally, I recommend the following books for background reading on Russian political developments since 1986:

- Anders Aslund (2007): *Russia's Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed*
- Anders Aslund (2019): *Russia's Crony Capitalism*
- Timothy Colton (2008): *Yeltsin: A Life*
- Mark Galeotti (2019): *We Need to Talk About Putin*
- Steven Lee Myers (2015): *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin*

Please consult “Reading Assignments” for the reading materials required for each class.

Study Groups and Collaboration Policies

- I would encourage you to join (or form!) an optional study group with fellow students. There is a lot of evidence that interaction with peers improves learning and makes courses more fun. This may be a particularly good option to try in an online course.
- Students forming a study group will be put in the same breakout room during classes and will collaborate on their oral presentation.
- The following rules apply: a group can be formed at any time during the semester by sending an email to Nataalka Bowley with consent from all members (please cc all group members on the email); a student can join only one group; a group can have no more than four students; a student can leave the group at any time by sending an email to Nataalka and other group members. Please reach out to me or Nataalka if you need help connecting with other students looking for study group partners.
- You are encouraged to discuss the readings with other students but reading responses should be entirely your own work.
- Likewise, you are encouraged to interact with fellow students when preparing your empirical note, but all the calculations and the note itself should be your own work.
- No collaboration is allowed on the final exam.

Expectations for Live Zoom Class Participation

- Please keep your camera on.
- Please keep your mike muted, unless speaking.
- When I ask a question, please use “Raise Hand” button if you want to respond.
- I may cold call you with a question and would appreciate a response. But declining to respond is OK, too (if not too often).
- If you have a question or a comment, please use “Raise Hand” button or write in Zoom chat.
- Please do not bring food to class, drinks are OK.