A. Russia and Poland Compared (Dr Harald Wydra) MT 2021

Introduction

This course introduces into central selected themes of Russian and Polish politics. The premise of the course is that historical trajectories of leadership and state-formation have been fundamental for understanding the recent challenges to political systems and democracy-formation. It therefore applies historical, political, and sociological methods in order to elucidate ideological patterns, the evolution of nationalism and nationhood, the impact of communism on the modernisation of states and societies, as well as the more recent transformations of regime-types. This course will develop conceptual tools that help understanding numerous family resemblances related to similar patterns of social development and state tradition but also highlight fundamental differences related to traditions of government, leadership, and commitments to different types of democracy.

Essential reading:


An indispensable historical account for understanding the challenges of state-formation, ideological structures, and imaginaries of the Polish nation.


This is an excellent account of the empire-building in Russia throughout the centuries with particular focus on the interaction between the Tsarist states and its multi-national and multi-ethnic subjects.

Plokhy, Serhii (2017) *Lost Kingdom: A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin* (New York: Basic books)

A very readable and recent history of Russian nationalism with specific focus on the new meanings of nationhood in the Russian federation.


An indispensable and very readable guide to understanding the political frameworks, processes, and structures of the politics of the Russian Federation.


Although quite dated, this book is still a very good guide to the unique political geographies of the post-imperial regions that constitutes ‘Eastern Europe’. It deals with structural challenges in the region by examining social, political, legal, and economic traditions.

This book provides a discourse analysis that examines the workings of networks of political elites that have dominated Russia ever since the late 1990s.


This book explores the social and political sources of democratization processes prior to regimes transformations in 1989/91 and the challenges for new regime types in the first decades of post-communist transitions.


This book provides a historical sociology of Polish nationalism and the unique and central role of the Catholic Church in Polish politics. It also covers the challenges of the role to Polish nationalism in post-communist Poland.


A very readable and gripping account by a foremost Russian journalist, portraying the rise of Vladimir Putin and the consolidation of his power through the prism of the networks of political elites that have shaped the last two decades of Russian politics.

**Lecture 1: State traditions and state formation**

This lecture looks at problems of territorial sovereignty, the rationales of centralised rule, and the fluidity of borders, which were characteristic for the ‘Eastern’ type of state-formation. Whilst there are common patterns of state development, this lecture also highlights the fundamentally different trajectories of state-building, in particular the imperial expansion of Russian statehood versus the statelessness and foreign domination in Poland.


Lecture 2: Nationalism and Nation-Building

This lecture explores paths of nation-building, variants of nationalism, and meanings of nationhood. It attempts to make sense of the paradoxical trajectories of Poland as a ‘nation without a state’ and the Russian empire as a ‘state without a nation’.


Lecture 3: Leadership and Ideological Traditions

This lectures examines key concepts of leadership and the attendant ideological traditions in both countries. Given the differences in state capacity, regime type, and religious-cultural traditions, the focus will on forms of political messianism, oriented towards the reconstitution of an independent state in Poland, and towards imperial expansion in the case of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, as well as the renewed attempts to neo-imperialism under state-led nationalism in the Russian Federation.


Lecture 4: Communism: Revolution, Resistance, Dissidence

Whilst both Russia and Poland shared the experience of communism as a fundamental period of state modernisation during the twentieth century, this lecture identifies the different modalities of its implementation, key institutional characteristics, and modes of resistance against communist power.


Lecture 5: Post-Communism: Paths to Democracy

This lecture explores different trajectories and meanings of democratisation in both countries. Whilst one focus will be on the similarities of regime transitions in the sense of producing republican governments with constitutional democratic systems this lecture is primarily concerned with the fundamental patterns of the modalities of regime transition and the reasons for why Poland created a parliamentary multi-party system, whilst the Russian Federation developed a super-presidential system supporting a managed state democracy.


**Lecture 6: Legacies of the Past: Identity Politics and Managed Democracy**

Before the background of fundamental differences in the democratic credentials of both systems and, more importantly perhaps, the divergent international anchorage of each country in different geo-political alliances, this lecture is interested in the weight and continuing significance of legacies of the past.


**Supervision essay questions:**

*Is there an Eastern European model of nationalism?*

*How did communist legacies influence democratisation processes in Eastern Europe?*

*Do transition processes weaken or strengthen state power?*

*How has nationalism shaped state traditions in Eastern Europe?*

*Was authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe dependent on national particularities?*

*Can legacies of the past explain the evolution of post-communist democracies?*