

PUTIN'S RUSSIA

OSHER LIFE-LONG LEARNING INSTITUTE, UC BERKELEY

SPRING 2021: MARCH 31 – MAY 19, 2021 (Wednesdays, 12:00pm – 1:30pm)

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ABSTRACT: Vladimir Putin has been in power for over twenty years. The policies he has pursued at home and abroad are very different from those adopted by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s and Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s. Why is that? How has Russian society evolved over the course of these twenty-plus years? And how has the system that Putin built adapted to changes in that society? Similarly, how have international relations changed during these decades and how has Putin's Russia reacted to those changes? We will start by examining the legacy of the Soviet era, the consequences of Gorbachev's reforms, and the impact of Yeltsin's presidency in the 1990s. We will then explore Putin's domestic and foreign policies during the 2000's, followed by the changes in those policies since 2010, bringing the analysis up to the present. All along we will ask how much of the regime's actions were driven by Putin himself, by the interests of the groups that occupy the Russian state, by pressures from within the broader society, or by the threats and opportunities that Russia faced in the international arena. We will conclude by speculating about where Putin, and the system he put in place, might be headed in coming years.

March 31: Gorbachev's Reforms: Democratization and Disintegration of the Soviet System

April 7: The Yeltsin 1990s: Transition to What?

April 14: Putin in Power, 2000-2011: The Search for Political Order and Economic Prosperity

April 21: Putin in Power, 2000-2011: The Search for a Respectable Place in the International Order

April 28: Putin's Second Go-Round, 2012-2021: Redefining Russian "Civilization"

May 5: Putin's Second Go-Round, 2012-2021: In Defiance of US Hegemony

May 12: Is Russia Currently in Crisis?

May 19: What Might Russia After Putin Look Like?

Reading: For those who would like to do some reading, I recommend Tony Wood, **RUSSIA WITHOUT PUTIN** (New York: Verso, 2020 updated edition; available also on Kindle). The appeal of this short book is that it focuses more on the social forces within Russian society, as an antidote to assuming that Putin himself is the source of everything that happens.