

POLI 629: Post-Communist Transformations

POLI 629
Winter 2024
Lea 517
Thu 2:35pm-5:25pm

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Office hours: Wed 10-12
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More than thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes in Eastern Europe, the post-communist states have evolved into vastly different polities. One group has consolidated democracy (with Hungary as the exception confirming the rule) and joined NATO and the European Union. Another set oscillates between semi-authoritarian and semi-democratic governance, while aiming to join the Euroatlantic structures. A third group has reverted back to authoritarianism. In this course, we will explore the unprecedented “triple transition” in national identities, political institutions and economic systems that resulted from Communism’s systemic breakdown. Due attention will be paid both to the main historical developments and to theoretical attempts to explain the different trajectories.

Course requirements

1) Reviews (15%)

The written review should include concise answers (**one or two sentences max!**) to the following questions for *each* assigned reading:

- a) What is the core argument?
- b) How does this reading relate to other reading(s)?
- c) What is the methodology?
- d) What important insight did you gain from this reading? That is, what do you now understand or know that you didn’t before doing this reading?
- e) How would you critique this reading? Consider methodology, logic, biases, omissions, etc. Does the author prove his/her argument convincingly?

Submit the review on myCourses before each class. Individual reviews are not graded, but you need to submit 10 reviews over the course of the semester in order to receive an A for this component.

2) Participation (10%)

You should be prepared to participate actively in each class to receive an A for this component. Your contributions should reflect that you’ve done the readings and can engage with the arguments. You can miss one class without penalty or justification. You can also sit one discussion out without penalty or justification.

3) Writing assignment options (75%)

Depending on your background preparation and on the main reason you’re taking this course, you can choose between three types of writing assignments.

- a) **Research paper (6000-8000 words)** on a topic approved by the instructor. A short paper proposal (500 words) is due on March 14. The final paper is due on April 10. This option is best for students who have substantial background in the material we are studying and/or expect to write their MA/PhD theses on a topic related to post-Communist politics.
- b) **3 comprehensive exam answers (25% each)** to questions from previous PhD comp exams. The answers should be 1500-2000 words long and should cover three questions, which do not overlap too much. Plan to submit at least one answer before Winter break. The final due date is April 10th. This option is recommended for PhD students, especially those who are covering the post-Communist region for the comparative exam, but would not be writing their dissertation on a post-Communist politics topic.
- c) **2 analytical essays + a “basic facts” presentation (25% each).** This option is recommended for students who are taking this course to learn something about a new topic and don’t have substantial background in the region. The **basic facts presentation** is a 10-15 minute presentation that summarizes important historical facts about a topic we are covering. You can choose from one of the following topics: 1) Collapse of Communism chronology; 2) Yugoslav and Soviet succession wars; 3) Post-Communist regime divergence; 4) Colour Revolutions chronology; 5) Russian regime trajectory; 6) Authoritarian regimes; 7) EU Accession chronology. Choose early which week you would like to present and come discuss the scope of the presentation with me. The two **analytical essays** are 1800-2200 words each and should cover one aspect of the readings in a given week in greater depth. The essay should have a clear thesis and should focus on defending it by using arguments/data from a few of the assigned readings (and additional ones, if necessary). Minimize summary; the essay isn’t a literature review, but an argumentative piece. Aim to submit one essay before Winter break and the other by April 10th.

Course Outline

Week 1 (Jan 4) Introduction (on Zoom)

Recommended: watch the movie “The Lives of Others” in preparation for the next class. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0405094/>

Start doing the Week 2 readings early!

Week 2 (Jan 11) What was Communism/Socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR

Stephen White, “What Was Communism?” in *Communism and Its Collapse* (Routledge 2001), pp. 1-10

Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next*, Princeton UP, 1996, 19-38

Richard Ericson, "The Classical Soviet-Type Economy: Nature of the System and Implications for Reform," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5:4 (1991): 11-27.

Aslund, Anders. *How capitalism was built: the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, Chapter 1

Maria Popova, "My grandfather said "Screw the Communists, but we all have to vote for them." *Journal of Narrative Politics* (2022).

Ghodsee, Kristen, and Julia Mead. "What has socialism ever done for women." *Catalyst* 2, no. 2 (2018): 101-133.

Dimitrina Petrova, "The Winding Road to Emancipation in Bulgaria", in Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, Ed. by Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, Routledge, 1993

McLellan, Josie. *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*. Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 1-22; 205-216.

Week 3 (Jan 18) The Soviet collapse and social science

Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44:1 (1991).

Beissinger, Mark R. "Nationalism and the collapse of Soviet communism." *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 331-347.

Valerie Bunce, "Peaceful versus Violent State Dismemberment: A Comparison of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia," *Politics & Society* 27:2 (1999).

"Transitology" debate between Schmitter/Karl and Bunce in *Slavic Review* (Spring 1994, Spring 1995, Winter 1995).

Recommended:

Stephen Cohen, "Was the Soviet System Reformable?" and responses from Kramer, Hanson, and Derlugian, *Slavic Review* 63:3 (2004).

"Collapse of Communism" chronology presentation

Week 4 (Jan 25) Economic transformation

Joel Hellman, "Winners take all: the politics of partial reform in postcommunist transitions." *World Politics* 50, no. 02 (1998), pp. 203-234.

Fish, M. Steven. "The determinants of economic reform in the post-communist world." *East European Politics and Societies* 12, no. 01 (1998): 31-78.

Aslund, Anders. *How capitalism was built: the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 2013; Chapter 2

Ghodsee, Kristen, and Mitchell Orenstein. *Taking stock of shock: Social consequences of the 1989 revolutions*. Oxford University Press, 2021, Chapter 1.

Juliet Johnson, "Path Contingency in Postcommunist Transformations," *Comparative Politics* 33:3 (2001): 253-274.

Feldmann, Magnus. "Emerging varieties of capitalism in transition countries: industrial relations and wage bargaining in Estonia and Slovenia." *Comparative political studies* 39, no. 7 (2006): 829-854.

Week 5 (Feb 1) Ethnic conflict, war, and minority rights

Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics*, v.54, no.2, January 2002, pp.245-276

King, Charles. "The benefits of ethnic war: understanding Eurasia's unrecognized states." *World politics* 53, no. 4 (2001): 524-552.

Dragovic-Soso, Jasna. "Why did Yugoslavia disintegrate? An overview of contending explanations." *State collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New perspectives on Yugoslavia's disintegration* (2008): 1-39.

David Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict", *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Autumn 1996), pp. 41-75

Csergo, Zsuzsa. *Talk of the nation: Language and conflict in Romania and Slovakia*. Cornell University Press, 2007.

"Yugoslav and Soviet succession wars" presentation

Week 6 (Feb 8) Explaining post-Communist divergence

Jeffrey Kopstein and David Relley, "Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World", *World Politics*, Volume 53, Number 1, October 2000, pp. 1-37

Lucan Way and Steven Levitsky, "Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide," *East European Politics & Societies*, Vol. 21, No.1, (2007), pp. 48-66.

Charles King, "Post-postcommunism: transition, comparison, and the end of "Eastern Europe"." *World Politics* 53, no. 1 (2000): 143-172.

Lucan Way and Adam Casey, "The structural sources of postcommunist regime trajectories," *Post-Soviet Affairs* (2018): 1-16.

Pop-Eleches, Grigore. "Historical legacies and post-communist regime change." *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (2007): 908-926.

McFaul, Michael. "The fourth wave of democracy and dictatorship: noncooperative transitions in the postcommunist world." *World politics* 54, no. 2 (2002): 212-244.

"Post-Communist divergence" presentation

Week 7 (Feb 15) Hybrid regimes and Colored Revolutions

Stephen Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism: Elections Without Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 2, Apr. 2002

Joshua Tucker, "Enough! Electoral fraud, collective action problems, and post-communist colored revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (2007), pp. 535-551

Henry Hale, "Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 305-329

Scott Radnitz, "The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet "Revolutions," *Comparative Politics*, Volume 42, Number 2 (January 2010), pp. 127-146.

Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *World Politics*, Volume 62, Issue 1 (January 2010), pp. 43-86

Mark Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2007), pp. 259-276

"Colour Revolutions chronology" presentation

Week 8 (Feb 22) Russia

Fish, M. Steven. *Democracy derailed in Russia: The failure of open politics*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz. *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Greene, Samuel A., and Graeme B. Robertson. *Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia*. Yale University Press, 2019.

Grigas, Agnia. *Beyond Crimea: the new Russian empire*. Yale University Press, 2016.

“Russia Beyond Putin” special issue: <https://direct.mit.edu/daed/issue/146/2> The entire issue is recommended, but focus on contributions by Hale, Popova, and Markus.

“Russian regime trajectory” presentation

Week 9 (Feb 29) Other authoritarian regimes in the region

Gerald Easter, "Preference for presidentialism: Postcommunist regime change in Russia and the NIS." *World Politics* 49, no. 02 (1997): 184-211.

Vitali Silitski, "Pre-empting democracy: the case of Belarus." *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 4 (2005): 83-97.

Onuch, Olga, and Gwendolyn Sasse. "The Belarus crisis: people, protest, and political dispositions." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 38, no. 1-2 (2022): 1-8. Skim all articles in the symposium

Edward Schatz, "The soft authoritarian tool kit: Agenda-setting power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 2 (2009): 203-222.

Luong, Pauline Jones, and Erika Weinthal. "Rethinking the resource curse: Ownership structure, institutional capacity, and domestic constraints." *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 9 (2006): 241-263.

Junisbai, Barbara, and Azamat Junisbai. "The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan: A Case Study in Economic Liberalization, Intraelite Cleavage, and Political Opposition." *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 3 (2005).

Marat, Erica. "Imagined past, uncertain future: The creation of national ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan." *Problems of post-Communism* 55, no. 1 (2008): 12-24.

“Authoritarian regimes” presentation

Week 10 (Mar 14) Democratic Consolidation and EU conditionality

Milada Vachudova. *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, eds. *The Europeanization of central and eastern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

Vachudova, Milada. "[External Actors and Regime Change: How Post-Communism Transformed Comparative Politics](#)." *East European Politics & Societies* 29:51 (2015): 9-530

Epstein, Rachel A., and Ulrich Sedelmeier. "Beyond conditionality: international institutions in postcommunist Europe after enlargement." *Journal of European public policy* 15, no. 6 (2008): 795-805.

Anna Grzymala-Busse and Abby Innes, "Great Expectations: The EU and Domestic Political Competition in East Central Europe" *East European Politics and Societies* 17, 2003, pp. 64-73

Judith Kelley, "International Actors on the Domestic Scene: Membership Conditionality and Socialization by International Institutions", *International Organization*, Vol. 58 (Summer 2004), pp. 425-457.

"EU Accession chronology" presentation

Week 11 (March 21) Political competition in democracies

Michael Bernhard. "What do we know about civil society and regime change thirty years after 1989?." *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (2020): 341-362.

Pop-Eleches, Grigore, and Joshua A. Tucker. "Communism's Shadow: Postcommunist Legacies, Values, and Behavior." *Comparative Politics* 43.4 (2011): 379-408.

Pop-Eleches, Grigore. "Throwing out the bums: Protest voting and unorthodox parties after communism." *World Politics* 62, no. 2 (2010): 221-260.

Monika Nalepa, *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-29

Shevel, Oxana. "The politics of memory in a divided society: A comparison of post-Franco Spain and post-Soviet Ukraine." *Slavic Review* 70, no. 1 (2011): 137-164.

Noutcheva, Gergana. "Societal empowerment and Europeanization: Revisiting the EU's impact on democratization." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 54, no. 3 (2016): 691-708.

Week 12 (March 28) The state and corruption

Keith Darden, "Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine under Kuchma," *East European Constitutional Review*, Vol. 10, Iss. 2/3 (2001), pp. 67-72

Magyar, Bálint. *Post-communist mafia state*. Central European University Press, 2016.

Marinov, Nikolay, and Maria Popova. "Will the Real Conspiracy Please Stand Up: Sources of Post-Communist Democratic Failure." *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 1 (2022): 222-236.

Ganev, Venelin I. "The Dorian Gray effect: winners as state breakers in postcommunism." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1-25.

Grzymala-Busse, Anna. *Rebuilding Leviathan: Party competition and state exploitation in post-communist democracies*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Week 13 (April 4) Populism, the far right, and democratic backsliding

Guest lecture—the Simone Veil JMCM Talk—by Maria Snegovaya on her book: *When Left Moves Right: The Decline of the Left and the Rise of the Populist Right in Postcommunist Europe*. Oxford University Press, 2024.

The public lecture will be followed by class discussion with Prof Snegovaya. To prepare for the class also read:

Bustikova, Lenka, and Petra Guasti. "The illiberal turn or swerve in Central Europe?." *Politics and Governance* 5, no. 4 (2017): 166-176.

Orenstein, M. A., & Bugarič, B. (2022). Work, family, Fatherland: the political economy of populism in central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(2), 176-195.

Binev, B. S. (2023). Post-Communist junctures, the left, and illiberalism: Theory with evidence from Central and Eastern Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(4), 465-502.

Milada Anna Vachudova (2020) Ethnopolitism and democratic backsliding in Central Europe, *East European Politics*, 36:3, 318-340,

Laurent, Pech, and Kim Lane Scheppele. "Illiberalism within: rule of law backsliding in the EU." *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies* 19 (2017): 3-47.