

Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe One Hundred Years On

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In the twenty years since communism's collapse, scholars of postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe have increasingly converged on the insight that *long-run continuities* reaching back to the nineteenth century are crucial in shaping some of the most important contemporary macro- and micro-level political outcomes in the region. Today's political cleavages, political discourses, patterns of partisan affiliation, institutional choice, and the quality of democracy itself all appear to correlate to a remarkable degree with patterns from the "deep past." To date, social scientists, however, have not sufficiently reflected on what might explain this finding and how to study the impact of the general phenomenon of the long-run in the region. This article makes two contributions. First, we contend that in general, long-run continuities may ironically be more important in contexts of discontinuous institutional change such as in Central and Eastern Europe since frequent institutional disjunctures paradoxically open chasms between formal and informal institutions, preventing gradual change and producing patterns of institutional mimicry to cope with institutional ruptures. This insight may travel to other contexts of weak institutionalization. Second, we reject efforts to identify "deep causes" of contemporary outcomes without specifying how intervening events and crises intersect with these longer-run patterns. The article resuscitates Fernand Braudel's notion of the *longue duree* to propose a new cumulative approach to the study of the long-run that complicates accounts that too starkly juxtapose precommunist and communist-era "legacies" on the present and argues that scholars should study how these periods reinforce each other and jointly determine contemporary outcomes.

Keywords: *democracy; long-run continuities; institutional change; postcommunism*

Not only do all political processes occur in history and therefore call for knowledge of their historical contexts, but also where and when political processes occur influence how they occur.

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Introduction

The collapse of communist regimes in 1989–1991, the rolling democratic transitions across East Central, South-East European, and the East European peripheries of Europe, the disintegration of communist federative states, and the emergence of new states heralded not only the end of a fifty-year experiment with communism, it also represented the latest moment in a *century-long* process of democratic transformations in Europe. The “outcast” states of Europe recovered their place as an intrinsic part of Europe and resumed their efforts that had begun in the nineteenth century, to construct and sustain democratic institutions. Building liberal, democratic states and rejoining Europe were after all the twin goals of the 1989 “refolutions.” In contrast with the failure of the earlier set of experiments with democracy in the post–World War I period, the post-1989 democratization experience has been in many ways unexpectedly successful for many formerly communist countries. One result of these contrasting outcomes has been a lively debate about the causes of successful transitions. But despite the debate, no one disputes one piece of evidence: the further East you look, the lower the probability of liberal political and economic outcomes.

This article departs from conventional views that have described post-communist experiences vis-à-vis other “third wave” regime transitions, and offers a different historically oriented perspective on the post-communist democratization processes of Eastern and Central Europe. We contend that if we only ground our analyses in the superficially similar “transitions” of other world regions (e.g., Latin America, Africa) we will miss important issues in the study of the region. If, on the other hand, we study the post-1989 transformations within the context of the century-long, often tumultuous but *distinctly European* democratization process that has transformed the continent since at least 1789, we come face-to-face with a new set of important questions. To compare the post-communist experience to democratic experiments in other temporally proximate third-wave cases in other world regions is to make the mistake of the drunkard whose search for his keys leads him to the spot he can most easily see—under the lamppost.

We therefore look beyond the most temporally obvious comparisons and reintegrate Eastern and Central Europe *analytically* back into European history. The result is that a series of fascinating and important problems emerge whose resolution may help us more thoroughly understand contemporary problems facing the region and democratization processes more generally. We are not the first who point out that Central and East European democratizations are distinctive if not sui generis.² The standard argument, however, emphasizes the unique nature of communist rule and specific legacies that communist regimes left behind. In contrast, our claim is that post-communist political transformations (outside of the former Soviet Union but including the Baltic states) should be conceptualized as a part of an ongoing and long-term historical democratization process across the gradient of Europe’s continent, from which the communist rule was but almost a temporary diversion. Moreover,

being a constitutive part of the European democratization process means that the contours and mechanisms of political transformations exhibit dynamics common to earlier European instances of democratization as well as reflect the changing constitution of Europe.

We ask: “*How does Central and Eastern Europe look one hundred years on?*” On the one hand, a long historical perspective suggests remarkable continuities with the past. The dramatic moment of transition in 1989–1990, successful and failed political and economic reforms, patterns of state building, and the varied relation to the European Union certainly have shaped democratization trajectories after communism in important ways. But these contemporary forces appear to do so only within the confines of a mix of varying pre-communist inheritances that seem to set the outer bounds of what is possible in the region. As others have noted,³ patterns of politics, competing political discourses, policy choices, regime stability, levels of the economic development, and the nature of institutional choices found in Central and Eastern Europe today⁴ tend to correlate with patterns of politics, levels of development, regime stability, and institutional choices in the region in the pre-communist period in the first half of the twentieth century. Also, even more fundamentally, the old nineteenth-century territorial divisions seem to persist in their impact, despite decades of changes that should have made them obsolete. For example, the historical partitions of Poland, the split between Western and Eastern Ukraine, or Transylvania and other parts of today’s Romania are still easily detectible in contemporary culture, politics, and economy.⁵ In sum, history thus appears to show puzzling continuities.

On the other hand, contingent political events, episodes of reforms, wars, and crises themselves also have a power that should caution us against an excessive determinism. Any scholar of the region knows that tragic experiences of war (genocide, population transfers, etc)⁶ followed by territorial changes, social and economic transformations engineered by the communists, and events that challenged communist rule—whether 1956, 1968, 1980, or 1989—were not merely endogenous repetitions of the past; the reshaping of social and economic foundations of these societies was fundamental; many disasters were inflicted and some were closely averted; opportunities were disastrously missed, and history was not simply “preordained” by “deep history.”⁷ Thus, we face a dilemma: how do we explain the region’s long-run continuities while recognizing the effects of communist rule and the power of events themselves? And, how do we systematically and convincingly make sense of the fact that the distant past appears to shape current outcomes, despite the sharp discontinuity produced by the communist period while simultaneously being attuned to the fact that human action can alter existing conditions?

The following article is not an empirical exercise but rather reflects on a series of problems and elaborates a set of propositions that might be useful for scholars to consider as they undertake research on the general phenomenon of *long-run* continuities in the region. We first outline some of the typical empirical puzzles that

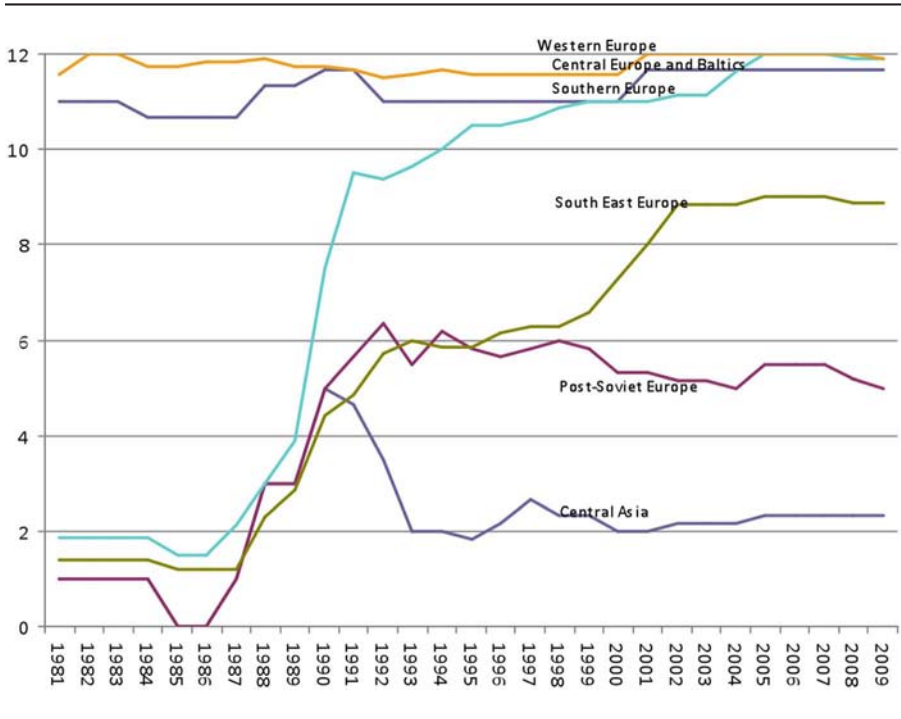
motivate scholars of the region. Next, we propose a distinctive approach to studying what Fernand Braudel originally called the *longue durée*.⁸ Rather than conceptualizing the *longue durée*, however, as Braudel did, as a centuries-long process in which “mentalities” flow across time, we make four points that have particular relevance to Central and Eastern Europe today. First, we narrow our focus to emphasize legacies flowing from the recent past—the nineteenth-century foundational arrival of modern states in Europe; this period, beginning roughly in 1848, casts a particularly powerful shadow on contemporary politics and economics. Second, we highlight not only the impact of loosely flowing “mentalities” across time as crucial but also the historical legacy of formal and informal institutions as well as patterns of cultural identification and economic development emerging from this earlier period. Third, rather than juxtaposing our argument to a notion of *l’histoire événementielle*, as Braudel did, we think it is crucial in the communist and post-communist context to focus on how these long-run “critical antecedents” *intersected* with events themselves, thereby altering political and economic life in profound ways.⁹ Finally, rather than thinking of the *longue durée* as producing iron-clad legacies, we argue that “legacies,” their meanings, and symbolic importance are themselves contested, reconstructed, and the subject of competing narratives, explaining in part the post-communist period’s predilection for “memory politics.”¹⁰ In sum, in the following we reflect on how a reinvigorated notion of Braudel’s original concept of the *longue durée* might be applied to a new set of research questions centered around the post-communist struggles for democracy, *one hundred years on*.

Two Unexpected Paradoxes of the Post-communist Experience

Students of political and economic transformations in post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe need to confront two paradoxes: first, why the communist experience appears to have meant so little for a significant number of countries that underwent swift transition to market economy, democracy, and successful integration into the European Union. After all, the initial debates on prospects for consolidation of democracy in the region were uniformly pessimistic in tenor. Post-communism was considered, with some good reasons, to be the most unfriendly environment in which to build liberal political and economic orders. Being a part of the former Soviet Union was seen as the most detrimental to building democracy and markets. Accordingly, scholars predicted the return to rule of “demagogues, priests and colonels”¹¹ or the emergence of “low-performing, institutionally mixed market economies and incomplete, elitist, and exclusionary democracies.”¹²

Second, why after two decades of transformations with seemingly limitless opportunities, similar goals and unprecedented levels of international support for liberal outcomes, is there nonetheless such a surprising lack of convergence among traditional subregions within the former Soviet bloc? While East Central Europe has seen relative fast convergence with old EU countries and South East European countries

Figure 1
Civil rights and political liberties in Europe, 1981–2009



Source: Freedom Houseⁱ

made some considerable progress, other subregions have endured stagnation and authoritarian reversals. Moreover, the distance on almost every empirical indicator among traditional subregions of the former Soviet bloc, as illustrated for example by the graph in Figure 1 showing the Freedom House ratings of civil rights and political liberties, seems to remain surprisingly and stubbornly stable.¹³ Trajectories of economic developments and welfare policies show similar patterns.

Conventional comparative democratization theory initially developed to account for the third wave of democratization¹⁴ emphasized contingent choices of elite actors, modes of transition and sequencing, elections and institutional choices, and tended to downplay the role of structural, cultural, and historical factors. The result is a literature that is unable to deal convincingly with the post-communist paradoxes outlined above.¹⁵ Furthermore, while arguments that highlight the “legacies of communist rule” as a driver of all outcomes point in the right direction by taking history more seriously, we emphasize that the substantial post-communist diversity in regime and state-building outcomes in many other former communist countries

suggest these cases cannot be treated exclusively as a cluster of cases whose shared communist legacies are all-powerful.

Instead, the way to unravel these paradoxes is to begin our analyses by recognizing the causal importance of the diverse *pre-communist* legacies in the region and to regard these cases as a constitutive part of Europe's longer historical democratization process and rooted in regional experiences during the transformative period of the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, we need to analyze the contours of contemporary Eastern and Central European transformations as part of a *longue durée*, going back to the critical period of nineteenth-century modernization and the period in the wake of World War I that includes the experiences of the communist period. In this "path" as well as "context dependent" (i.e., the European context) process of democratization and de-democratization, initial experiences may even carry more weight for some dimensions of change than may more recent experiences. When viewed in this light, pre-communist and communist-era legacies are not "alternative explanations" but rather often *reinforce each other* and have jointly shaped a variety of contemporary outcomes. These outcomes include institutional choices after 1989, the nature of active political cleavages, the proclaimed identity of political actors, the main contours of the political discourse, patterns of partisan affiliation, and, finally, the performance of democracy and degree of democratic consolidation. In their impact on these outcomes, path- and context-dependent dynamics are visible in specific cases, for example, that the lands of the Czech Republic were industrialized before communist rule, shaped economic life under communism, and appears to shape economic performance today.¹⁶ Whether a country experienced some form of democracy before the communist rule, as Poland did, for example, mattered not only for the nature of communist rule but to democratization today.¹⁷ In addition, the very location of Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Imperial boundaries in the pre-communist period affected not only the type of communism during the communist period and patterns of the economic development but also the partisan identification and rates of electoral participation today.¹⁸

We need, in other words, to study the cumulative nature of pre-communist legacies, as well as moments of successful and failed liberalization reforms and democratization efforts during the period of communist rule to be able to assess the diversity of initial conditions and different political opportunity structures that emerged after 1989. Some further examples of pre-communist and communist-era dynamics interacting to produce contemporary outcomes include Poland's early crisis-driven trajectory of political developments that produced the unprecedented pattern of contentious liberalization under communist regime; this tendency, it has been argued, is rooted in Poland's early historical experiences with democracy, helping us understand Polish politics today.¹⁹ Similarly, we can track the historical roots of the resurgence of right-wing politics in Hungary today not only to the brutal suppression of the 1956 revolution but also to lingering trauma of the Trianon treaty and

the failed communist revolution in 1919. Also, the “velvet revolution” and the subsequent collapse of the Czechoslovak federation cannot be grasped without understanding the nature and defeat of the Czechoslovak Prague Spring in 1968, the experiences of World War II, and, even further back, the Czech democratic tradition and experiences over the last one hundred years. Thus, subregional differences and country-specific trajectories from the pre-communist period persisted during the communist period and remain visible today. How these episodes and trajectories relate to post-communist, war, and pre-war experiences, while an emerging area of research, remain only loosely theorized, and thus are an important *lacunae* in the current scholarship.²⁰

Making Sense of Continuity in the Face of Discontinuity: Post-communism in Its European Context

Thus, it is evident we need to turn to history. But here we confront our central challenge and theoretical dilemma: First, how precisely do we do this type of analysis? And, second, more fundamentally, how is it possible that historical legacies and the *longue durée* matter so much in a region marked by such discontinuous change? If the continuous flow of history faces such frequent ruptures, why does the past matter so much?

It is our contention that legacies of the *longue durée* may ironically be more important precisely in situations of discontinuous institutional changes. Such transformations after all, do not produce the incremental changes of formal rules and continuous marginal adjustments that allow the gradual equilibration of formal institutions and formal rules as well as the incremental shifting of interests and identities, as identified in the influential work of Thelen,²¹ Thelen and Streek, and Thelen and Mahoney.²² In fact, we think that paradoxically, discontinuous changes may open large chasms between formal and informal institutions, preventing gradual adjustments.²³ Moreover, discontinuous changes produce *institutional mimicry*: formal institutions inherited from the old regime conceal and preserve their identity and norms, which can then in turn quickly be resurrected in the changed conditions.²⁴ The result is to reproduce and reinforce *longue durée* historical legacies precisely because of the discontinuity in formal institutions.

This argument fills a gap in the literature on institutional change that typically focuses on *highly institutionalized contexts* marked by an absence of frequent institutional ruptures. Also it builds on a growing interest among scholars in the issue of historical legacies. If we look at recent empirical work by Darden, Darden and Grzymala Busse, Pop-Eleches and Tucker, and Wittenberg, they all seek to make sense of long-run continuities in a way that does not simply point to “deep causes” without also seeking to combine such explanation with a focus on causal mechanisms

and more proximate causes that themselves are crucial to any successful theoretical account.²⁵ Whether it is the persistence of partisan loyalties carried by religious institutions (e.g., Wittenberg) or imperial legacies (e.g., Darden), or the persistence of voting patterns due to pre-communist rural social structure and landholding inequality,²⁶ one point is clear: the task of understanding how long-run “critical antecedents”²⁷ shape outcomes despite—or even perhaps because of—historical ruptures sits at the forefront of work on the region.

Yet to argue that long-run continuities determine contemporary outcomes, however, is to enter normatively and methodologically treacherous terrain;²⁸ one can easily be accused of determinism, being an advocate of “deep history,” and being unwilling to accept the possibilities of change. We are by no means advocates of such an ahistorical and fundamentally atheoretical image of stasis and continuity. Indeed, it is precisely our goal to identify and point to strategies for resolving the dilemma that continuity constrains human action despite our impression that events also matter.

How, then, do we proceed? First, we suggest scholars ought to place Central and Eastern Europe’s contemporary developments within their *European* historical context. Indeed, the idea that long run continuities are at work in shaping present-day variation is not distinctive to the post-communist region. Victor Perez-Diaz, for example, explores the Spanish democratic transition not as an example of third-wave transition but rather within the context of broader European political transformations. He emphasizes the *European* roots of the Spanish transition, noting,

By the mid-seventies the economic, social, and cultural institutions of Spain were already quite close to those of Western Europe and the cultural beliefs, normative orientations, and attitudes of the people that accompanied the workings of these institutions had become fairly similar to those of other Europeans.²⁹

In short, what we can call the *context specificity* of European experience of democratization has played a major role in all transformations within the region, from southern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s to Eastern Europe in the 1990s and should be at the center of analysis.

Second, we argue that the study of this region can benefit from a series of larger debates within political science more generally that have looked at how long-run factors intersect with short-run moments of critical juncture. At the center of this revival of interest in these issues is the idea that the long run’s impact does not dissolve in moments of critical juncture but has an enduring impact in its interaction with events. These ideas of what has been called a “historical turn” have been elaborated more fully elsewhere.³⁰ But the approach we outline here is to recognize that *events and episodes do remake history but often not entirely as intended. Political actors even in decisive moments of change face the inheritance of the past, and are thereby both constrained and empowered by the past. While change is possible, the outer bounds of change are to a significant degree the product of “deep*

history.” We can deploy some of insights of Capocchia and Ziblatt to elaborate this argument in three points.

First, following Capocchia and Ziblatt, we argue that “history should be read ‘forward’ and not ‘backward.’”³¹ This means quite precisely that analysis should simply not take contemporary outcomes and try to link these to historical causes. Instead, it is more useful to turn to historical turning points themselves—whether 1848, 1918, 1945, 1948, 1956, 1968, 1980, or 1989—to “undertake a thorough analysis of the ideologies, resources, and institutional legacies shaping the choices of actors involved in the process of institution-building”³² in these moments and then try to link these to long-run outcomes. In East European studies, for example, the fate of small nations in the region was too often seen as an inevitable outcome of international power politics (e.g., Trianon, Yalta) over which domestic actors had no control. While there may be much truth in such views, the tyranny of international factors is not complete and domestic actors still have room for maneuver. Examining the role of domestic actors, their political battles, and the long-run outcomes of these political battles in these key moments of institutional change is a promising avenue of research because it allows us to see how contingency, events, and “critical antecedents” intersect.³³

Second, we should not view history as “synchronized”—that is, we should not assume that all good things always move together simultaneously (including the key institutional elements of democracy). Instead, it is crucial to remember that democracy is a cluster of discrete institutions that often emerges “one institution-at-a-time.”³⁴ The consequence of adopting an “asynchronic” perspective on institutional change is that the analyst is not as puzzled as she otherwise would be by the often surprising sequence and timing of how politics actually unfolds. As Timothy Garton Ash famously noted in November 1989 describing unfolding regime changes in the region, “in Poland it took 10 years, in Hungary 10 months, in the GDR ten weeks, perhaps in Czechoslovakia it will take 10 days.”³⁵ This situation raises a number of critical analytical challenges. And indeed as William Sewell persuasively argues more generally, but in a way that is certainly applicable to democratization,

That there are a diversity of temporalities operating in any present raises difficult analytical challenges. . . . Which social processes, with which temporalities, will emerge as dominant in an event that mixes them together? How, and when, do short-term processes override, deflect, or transform long-term processes? How do long-term trends reassert themselves in situations where they seem to have been eclipsed by more pressing political processes?³⁶

A further consequence of such a move is that one can make sense of the proliferation of hybrid regimes in the post-communist world.³⁷ This is a perspective that can also make sense of the frequent disjuncture that exists between the extent of liberalization in subnational and national levels of government in the region. In the authoritarian period, for example, some regions, in Yugoslavia (e.g., Slovenia) liberalized while the national polity did not. In the democratic period, as in Latin

America, subnational pockets of authoritarianism have emerged and coexist within nominally democratic national regimes.³⁸ While some recent cases such as the post-1989 East European democratic transitions might at first glance be viewed as exemplars of “wholesale changes,” some leading accounts have reinterpreted institutional changes of democratization even here as a long-run, and often gradual, process.³⁹

Third, the research strategy that suggests itself from this view is, therefore, as Capoccia and Ziblatt have noted, to analyze episodes of institutional reform, which could be moments during the communist regime or even earlier and how these episodes are linked to each other over time. As Capoccia and Ziblatt note, this approach,

. . . shows among other things, that conflicts over democratic institutions and liberalization do not occur “sealed-off” from each other, merely reflecting domestic conditions at the time: instead, past or concurrent experiences of successful or failed democratization or liberalization (from other countries as well as within the same country) arm democracy’s opponents and proponents with competing causal narratives or “lessons” from the past, thus significantly shaping their behavior.⁴¹

For our purpose of studying the long run, the benefit of this perspective in the post-communist environment is clear. Traditional economic accounts of democratization that almost single-mindedly emphasize the impact of class actors on democratization have great difficulty with post-communist cases because different and often underappreciated factors were at work in these cases. For example, nationalism, as students of the post-communist region certainly understand, not only shapes democratization trajectories but it is fundamental in generating liberalization and democratization processes. Similarly, as Capoccia and Ziblatt also note, political parties are often an underappreciated factor in democratization.⁴² In this respect, in the post-communist world, it is necessary to examine the impact of the communist parties themselves in post-1945 Eastern Europe, as key actors in *shaping* democracy’s prospects.⁴³ Finally, in sum, by analyzing specific episodes, rather than downplaying structural factors, we can analyze long-run legacies precisely in the contexts in which they make themselves felt: in moments of institutional redesign and episodes of important institutional change.

Taken together, these three points suggest that democratization as well as de-democratization are processes that may occur in events, crises, and moments that are important because they are crucial moments of “divergence” (Slater and Simmons, 2010) that send countries on different paths. In Europe as a whole, the usual narrative points to the “turning points” of critical junctures in 1848, 1918, 1945, and 1989.⁴⁴ For Eastern Europe, de-democratization or failed democratization episodes (e.g., 1948, 1956, 1968, 1980) are equally crucial. Because of the frequency of these disjunctures, however, our final point is a counterintuitive one: we contend that the region as a whole is particularly susceptible to the impact of preconditions or

“background factors” (i.e., *longue durée* legacies) that may assert themselves in such disjunctive moments. In short, it may ironically be that the *longue durée* rears its head above all in moments of great apparent upheaval and change.

Reinterpreting the Cases: The Theoretical and Empirical Implications of a “Long-Run” View in Post-communist Studies

The views outlined above may be useful for understanding post-communist political developments because the way social scientists traditionally conceive of modern East European history is flawed in three fundamental ways: first, the fascination with the sharpness of discontinuities and critical breaks have produced a fragmented history focusing on discrete periods that have overlooked important continuities. Second, the importance of the connections between the Eastern and Western parts of the continent have also been profoundly underestimated. Finally, at least in comparative politics, the study of the region has been running away from history. So-called comparative communism before and transitology more recently tended to disregard the historical context and distinct historical trajectories of specific countries.

To understand the 1989 democratizations and their outcome in particular, we need to acknowledge that during the twentieth century Central and Eastern Europe experienced at least three major moments/episodes of real or, at least, *potential* openings that could have resulted in democratic breakthroughs and the consolidation of democracy: in 1918, 1945, and 1989. After 1918, new democratic regimes were established in the region, but faced multiple domestic and international challenges, and thus degenerated into various types of hybrid and authoritarian regimes everywhere except for Czechoslovakia. The failure of pre-war democracy and modernization in the region followed by the horrors of World War II diminished support for Western-style democracy, and thus eased the way for the post-1945 communist takeover. For example, the restored Czechoslovak state (the only surviving democracy in the intra-war period) had a functioning multiparty system with an apolitical state administration; it also recognized non-communist leaders and experienced relatively clean initial elections. The ineptitude of non-communist politicians and left sympathies of the electorate (communists won 40 percent of the votes in *de facto* free elections), however, were crucial and may well had been the main factor in the successful communist takeover in 1948.

After 1945, democracy’s prospects were extremely limited despite the façade of multiparty politics and elections. But even then, the alignment of political blueprints and realities was not perfect and room for maneuver was greater than is traditionally thought. As Schopflin notes,

The paradox of how politically weak and isolated communist parties were able to take over Eastern Europe . . . is usually explained by reference to the presence of the Red Army and the feebleness of the Western response to Soviet expansion after 1945. . . . The problem with this interpretation is that while it properly focuses attention on Soviet actions and Western inaction, it largely ignores Eastern Europe itself and implies that East Europeans watched helplessly as external forces decided their fate. In particular, it suggests that at no point did East Europeans have any choice over their future. This appears to be a considerable oversimplification of what actually happened.⁴⁵

Unlike after 1918, when newly emerged East European states introduced liberal political and economic institutions only to experience the gradual ascent of statist policies and authoritarian rule, the post-1945 “democratic interlude” ended quickly with the communist takeover across the region by 1948. After 1989, on the other hand, successful consolidation of democracy became a norm in East Central Europe but faced fundamental challenges in other parts of the former Soviet bloc. Rather than viewing these dates as discrete and unrelated watershed moments, we contend that it is more useful to view them as three critical junctures *cumulatively*, leaving in place long-lasting legacies that shaped political trajectories of countries of the region.

It is commonsensical to argue that the communist takeovers after 1945 cannot be fully comprehended without accounting for the disappointments, economic failures, and authoritarian experiences of the inter-war period and the devastations and atrocities of the war that followed. While communism seemed to be a fundamental departure from historical trajectories and the traditions of these countries, continuities between pre- and post-World War II states have been frequently noted. Rothschild, for example, emphasizes striking continuities in both the form and styles of governmental activity.⁴⁶ Kitschelt points to the persistence of specific bureaucratic traditions.⁴⁷ Jowitt notes striking social continuities he describes as neotraditionalism.⁴⁸ Others have investigated the continuity of East European intelligentsia and its cultural preferences and politics.⁴⁹ This suggests an important conclusion: different East European state socialisms in the region exhibited their pre-1945 roots more extensively than we often tend to assume. The continuity between the pre-communist and the communist period and the resulting variety of state socialism thus is crucial for understanding a range of attributes of these societies.

In contrast to the understudied continuity between pre-communist and communist periods, the debates about the legacy of communist rule for post-1989 politics have been extensive.⁵⁰ While multiple continuities have been emphasized in all possible dimensions, scholars tend to understand communist legacies as a package of variables common to all post-communist societies with largely negative consequences for the subsequent politics. But “real” historical legacies of communism are context specific, not system specific. We argue, therefore, that post-1989 developments need to be analyzed in the context of post-1945 trajectories of political conflicts and struggles in specific locations. This period of seeming stasis and forced

standardization was dotted with episodes of liberalization and de-liberalization, hopes for political change and bitter disappointments, partial reforms, and their reversals. These episodes left enduring legacies that shaped both democratic breakthroughs and post-1989 developments.⁵¹ Yet the post-1989 trajectories also reflected the pre-communist legacies in institutional and policy choices, political tastes, discourses, and cultural orientations. Not a single country in the region, for example, departed from the form of government and electoral institutions it established during the first episode of democratization in the post-World War I period. More worryingly, some of the pre-war political discourses are functioning remarkably well, despite profound change in social conditions and ethnic composition of East European states.

While historians and political scientists have studied the emergence and failure of democracies in the region during the inter-war period as a part of the general European political trajectory, the other two critical junctures (i.e., 1945 and 1989) have been treated differently. They are normally examined as discrete events and as basically intra-Soviet bloc affairs with no connection to West European experiences. West Europeans were seen as spectators who had no real capacity to shape internal events within the Soviet sphere of domination, and 1945 was considered to be the ancient past in 1989. While this view emphasizing internal developments in communist states and the capricious nature of Soviet imperial domination may be partially true, the connection to Europe was a critical dimension of Central European dissent and reform communism during the communist period. As Norman Davies noted, “the concept of Europe was no less alive in the East than in the West. Soviet tyranny was very effective in promoting the European ideal by default. Citizens of the former Soviet bloc were mightily impressed by Western Europe’s food mountains; but there is every reason to believe that their aspirations to rejoin ‘Europe’ had a spiritual as well as a material dimension.”⁵² Thus, we suggest that understanding of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe would benefit not only from a longer-term historical perspective but also how these long-run factors influenced episodes of liberalization, democratization, and de-democratizations but also from recognition of the European connection as well as diffusion of European ideas and its limits.⁵³

The most significant challenge for the approach we propose is a methodological one. How do we investigate empirically situations in which historical continuities are interspaced with deep discontinuities that remake not only political and economic institutions but also the territorial and ethnic composition of specific countries? What are the mechanisms that reproduce norms, institutions, mentalities, and belief systems, despite often revolutionary transformations. In short, how do continuities persist? We do not have answers to these questions. It seems, however, that the standard tools developed in comparative politics, such as process-tracing strategies, have limited utility in cases with deep discontinuities. Such approaches must certainly be combined with the multiple methods comparativists have at their disposal (e.g., historical, quantitative methods), along with methods used by histori-

ans and anthropologists. The question of what mechanisms account for long-run historical continuities is a cutting-edge area of research. Analysts such as Darden, Wittenberg, and others have emphasized a quite disparate list of plausible mechanisms, including informal institutions, religious and educational institutions, political culture, communities and social capital, families, and socialization process. All of these ideas need to be considered seriously and their role needs to be assessed empirically. Thus, investigating continuities requires multiple research strategies, disciplinary cooperation, and consideration of multiple mechanisms.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have elaborated a series of claims about the role of the *longue durée* in contemporary post-communist societies. But above all, we offer a simple insight. In order to understand the processes of democratization and outcomes of democratic transformations across the former communist world, we need to treat seriously both path dependency (the individual trajectories of specific countries and *longue durée* dynamic) as well as context dependency (the affinity to the general process of European democratization).

The problem of historical continuities, especially in cases that experienced profound political and economic discontinuities, represents a substantial challenge to comparative politics. Almost all work in historical sociology and comparative politics in the last decades after all has focused on discontinuities and major reorderings of social, political and economic life. Scholars study revolutions, rebellions, social movements, the formations of states, regime changes, and other major reforms, armed with “a loose synthesis of Marxian and Weberian historical narratives [that] directed attention to specific types of historical discontinuities”⁵⁴ Research on continuities, reproduction, and durability has been until recently less well developed, except for some work on the persistence of suboptimal organizations, practices, and institutions. These suboptimal outcomes are typically explained as results of a powerful path-dependent dynamic. Such a perspective, however, has difficulty coping with the sharp discontinuities that ought to have reshuffled politics in Eastern and Central Europe in fundamental ways. Thus, understanding outcomes of post-communist transformations and East European politics in general requires a shift in empirical and analytical efforts from making sense of discontinuity to understanding the nature of continuities and the interaction of continuity and discontinuity.

We also have called attention to *longue durée* historical legacies. We have also argued that *longue durée* legacies are ironically more important in situations of discontinuous institutional change because these types of transformations do not produce incremental changes but instead open up major and enduring gaps between formal and informal institutions and generate institutional mimicry, pre-

venting gradual adjustments, and in turn reproduce and reinforce *long-run* historical legacies.

In sum, in saying that the long run and short run have interacted in subtle ways in Central and Eastern Europe, we have, in some sense, stated for students of politics and history the self-evident; and to bolster our case, we end this essay by quoting a well-known German philosopher: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁵⁵

Notes

1. C. Tilly, “Why and How History Matters,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. R. Goodin and C. Tilly (Oxford University Press, 2006), 420.

2. See, e.g., V. Bunce, “Should Transitologists Be Grounded,” *Slavic Review* 54 (1995): 111–27; V. Bunce, “Comparing East and South,” in *Democracy after Communism*, ed. L. Diamond and M. Plattner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 18–32; V. Bunce, “Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience,” *World Politics* 55 (2003): 167; M. McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 54 (2002): 212. For the defense of the cross-regional comparative perspective, see Phillippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go,” *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 172.

3. See, e.g., A. Janos, “Continuity and Change in Eastern Europe: Strategies of Post-communist Politics,” *East European Politics and Societies* 8 (1994): 1; A. Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski, and Gabor Toka, *Post-communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); J. Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Keith Darden and Anna Grzymala Busse, “The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse,” *World Politics* 59 (2006): 81.

4. Adam Przeworski et al. report the striking continuity in constitutional choices in countries that experienced democracy Adam Przeworski, Michale Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, “What Makes Democracy Endure,” *The Global Divergence of Democracies*, ed. L. Diamond and M. Plattner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 167.

5. See, e.g., K. Jasiewicz, “The Past Is Never Dead: Identity, Class, and Voting Behavior in Contemporary Poland,” *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 491–508; R. Szporluk, “The Making of Modern Ukraine: The Western Dimension,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 25, no. 1/2 (2001): 57; G. Sasse, “The ‘New’ Ukraine: A State of Regions,” *Regional and Federal Studies* 11, no. 3 (2001): 69; G. Sasse, “Ukraine: The Role of Regionalism,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2010): 99.

6. See T. Snyder, “The Historical Reality of Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 1 (2007): 7.

7. We also agree with Jeffrey Kopstein that the communist-led coercive modernization irrevocably altered many critical dimensions of traditional social orders in the region. See J. Kopstein, “1989 as a Lens for the Communist Past and Post-Communist Future,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 289.

8. Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

9. Dan Slater and Erica Simmons, “Informative Regress: Critical Antecedents in Comparative Politics,” *Comparative Political Science* 43, no. 7 (2010): 886.

10. See Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard, "A Theory of the Politics of Memory," in *Twenty Years After: 1989 and the Politics of Memory*, ed. M. Bernhard and J. Kubik (Manuscript 2012).

11. K. Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

12. B. Greskovits, *The Political Economy of Protest and Patience* (Budapest: Central European University, 1998).

13. See, e.g., J. Rupnik, "The Postcommunist Divide," *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 1 (1999): 57; G. Ekiert, J. Kubik, and M. Vachudowa, "Democracy in Postcommunist World: An Unending Quest," *East European Politics and Societies*, 21, no. 1 (2007): 1.

14. See, e.g., Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); S. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

15. For limitations of this approach see, e.g., T. Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002): 5; and Larry Diamond, Marc Plattner, and Philip Costopoulos, eds., *Debates on Democratization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

16. See Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World*; J. Kopstein, "Post-Communist Democracy: Legacies and Outcomes," *Comparative Politics* 35, no. 2 (2003): 231.

17. G. Pop-Eleches, "Historical Legacies and Post-communist Regime Change," *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (2007): 908.

18. Keith Darden, *Resisting Occupation: Mass Schooling and the Creation of Durable National Loyalties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming, 2013).

19. See, e.g., Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1999), chap. 2.

20. For efforts to bridge these stages in East European developments see, e.g., J. Gross, "Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 3, no. 2 (1989): 198; Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty*.

21. K. Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

22. Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen, eds., *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Kathleen Thelen and James Mahoney, eds., *Explaining Institutional Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

23. The question of how we know such "chasms" exist is a difficult but important empirical question and is one that certainly deserves greater research attention than it has received to date. For an effort to address some of these issues, see Steven Levitsky and Gretchen Helmke, eds., *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

24. E.g., many pre-communist civil society traditions and formal organizations survived under communist rule, especially on the local level. They served as hidden carriers of local traditions and norms and provided the space for shelter from direct political interference. See J. Kurczewski, ed., *Lokalne społeczności obywatelskie* (Warsaw: OBS Warszawa, 2003); Joanna Kurczewska, "Tradycje w przestrzeni lokalnego społeczeństwa obywatelskiego," in *Samoorganizacja Społeczeństwa Polskiego: III sektor I wspólnoty lokalne w jednoczącej się Europie*, ed. Piotr Głinski, Barbara Lewenstein, and Andrzej Sicinski (Warsaw: IFiS PAN, 2004), 302–32; Anna Gasior-Niemiec and Piotr Głinski, "Polish Tradition of Self-organization, Social Capital and the Challenge of Europeanisation," in *Social Capital and Governance*, ed. Fran Adam (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007a), 237.

25. For the paradigmatic statement of the need to combine "proximate" with "deep" causes for successful theory building, see H. Kitschelt, "Accounting for Communist Regime Diversity: What Counts as a Good Cause," *Capitalism and Democracy*, ed. G. Ekiert and S. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49.

26. Konstantin Kashin and Daniel Ziblatt, "A Missing Historical Variable? Landholding Inequality and Voter Turnout in Germany, 1895-2009" (Paper presented at Council of European Studies annual meeting, Barcelona, Spain, June 20–22, 2011).

27. Slater and Simmons, "Informative Regress," 886.
28. See Kitschelt, "Accounting for Communist Regime Diversity," 49.
29. V. Perez-Diaz, *The Return of Civil Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 17.
30. See Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, eds., "The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond," *Comparative Political Studies* 43(2010); see Slater and Simmons "Informative Regress," 886; Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
31. Capoccia and Ziblatt, "Historical Turn in Democratization Studies," 939.
32. Ibid.
33. Slater and Simmons, "Informative Regress."
34. See, e.g., D. Ziblatt, "How Did Europe Democratize?" *World Politics* 58 (2006): 311; Capoccia and Ziblatt, "Historical Turn in Democratization Studies," 939.
35. T. Garton Ash, *Magic Lantern* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).
36. W. Sewell, *Logics of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2005), 9.
37. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 132 (2002): 51.
38. On Latin America, see E. Gibson, "Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries," *World Politics* 58, no. 1 (2005): 101.
39. See Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich Preuss, *Institutional Design in Postcommunist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
40. Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59 (April 2007): 341–69.
41. Capoccia and Ziblatt, "Historical Turn in Democratization Studies," 940.
42. Capoccia and Ziblatt, "Historical Turn in Democratization Studies," 949–52.
43. See A. Grzymala Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
44. Capoccia and Ziblatt, "Historical Turn in Democratization Studies," 941.
45. G. Schopflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993).
46. J. Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
47. Kitschelt et al., *Post-communist Party Systems*.
48. Jowitt, *New World Disorder*, chapter on neo-traditionalism.
49. See, e.g., George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979); Z. Bauman, "Intellectuals in East-Central Europe: Continuity and Change," *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 5 (1987): 162; Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi, and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists* (London: Verso, 1998); G. Ekiert, "The End of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Last Middle Class Revolution?" *Political Power and Social Theory* 21 (2010): 99.
50. Jowitt, *New World Disorder*; Zoltan Barany and Ivan Volgyes, eds., *The Legacies of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1995); Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart eds., *Liberalization and Leninist Legacies: Comparative Perspective on Democratic Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Grzymala Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*; Grzegorz Ekiert, and Stephen E. Hanson, eds. *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kopstein, "Post-Communist Democracy," 231; Michael Bernhard and Timothy Nordstrom, "Communist Legacies and Democratic Survival in Comparative Perspective," 2010, Unpublished paper; G. Pop-Elches, "Historical Legacies"; G. Pop-Elches and J. Tucker, "Communist Legacies, and Political Values and Behavior: A Theoretical Framework with an Application to Political Party Trust" *Comparative Politics* 43, no. 4 (2011): 379–408; J. Wittenberg, "What Is a Historical Legacy?" (Paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2–5, 2010).

51. See, e.g., G. Ekiert, *The State against Society: Political Crises and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and G. Ekiert, "Rebellious Poles: Cycles of Protest and Popular Mobilization Under State-Socialism, 1945-1989," Working paper series, Advanced Study Center, International Institute, University of Michigan, 1995-1996, no. 5.

52. N. Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1058.

53. Capoccia and Ziblatt, "Historical Turn in Democratization Studies."

54. E. Clemens, "Toward a Historicized Sociology: Theorizing Events, Processes, and Emergence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 527.

55. K. Marx, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).

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