THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF EAST EUROPEAN POLITICS

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"The Handbook brings together a group of leading European and American experts who comprehensively address almost all important aspects of post-communist politics in Eastern Europe. It will be indispensable in the classroom and as a resource for other researchers."
— Michael Berendt, University of Florida, US

"The Routledge Handbook of East European Politics highlights the diversity and relevance of the region. Both are extremely timely messages in academic and policy circles. The Handbook is bound to become a standard reference point in the discussion about the first twenty-five years of post-communism. It brings together a stellar group of scholars who take stock, survey the empirical and conceptual contributions of social science research on the region, and map avenues for future research. The relationship between international and domestic processes of change, the role of historical legacies, and the discrepancy between formal rules and institutions on the one hand and actual practices on the other hand, are key themes highlighted throughout the Handbook."
— Gauntlyna Savell, University of Oxford, UK
Spectacular and sometimes tragic in their consequences, waves of contention have swept Eastern Europe since the end of the Second World War with remarkable regularity. From the initial armed resistance through manifold forms of everyday disobedience to spectacular outbursts of rebellious anger, the people of Eastern Europe have periodically challenged existing regimes. Protest under communism came from oppressed and voiceless social groups challenging powerful authorities through weakly institutionalised mobilisations that in turn provoked extremely repressive responses from the state. After 1989, protests have become routinised, highly institutionalised and organised by political movements and civil society organisations. Today, contention is a constant feature of post-communist politics generating a high number of significant protest events.

Western theory of contention and protest politics in Eastern Europe

There is a large, diverse social science and history literature on protest, contention, and oppositional activities in Eastern Europe both before and after 1989. We review the scholarship on the late period, focusing in particular on its theoretical trajectory. The goal is to identify and briefly characterize the main stages in the development of the literature on protest in Eastern Europe and to trace down mutual influences between this literature and theories of contentious politics developed in the Western social sciences.

There are four distinctive stages in the scholarly literature on post-1945 protest in the region. They correspond roughly to the four historical phases of contention. A series of early rebellions against the new communist rule across the region constitutes the first stage. Largely descriptive analyses of this period are interspersed with theoretical strands inspired by the idea of totalitarianism and some elements of collective behaviour and mass society theories (Zinner 1962, Baring 1972, Lewis 1988).

The second phase is marked by the emergence of dissident movements, counter hegemonic discourses, and open political opposition, rooted in the defeat of communist reformers of the Prague Spring and made possible by the Helsinki Accords of 1975.3 The rise and defeat of the Solidarity movement in Poland was its central event. Scholars studying the second phase at the time (and often later) rely mostly on case studies and employ several broad interpretative approaches popular in the social science of the period: historical and political sociology, political...
Anthropology, and critical Marxism combined with the resurrected concept of civil society (see also Christ in this volume). Their work is informed by a broad liberal stance centered on the idea of pluralism and inalienable human rights and freedoms.

The revolutions of 1989-1991, created here as the third phase in the history of post-1945 contention in Eastern Europe, were massive upheavals across the entire region leading to the collapse of communist regimes, the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, and the emergence of new nation states. These revolutions immediately attracted scholarly attention and have yet to cease fascinate scholars representing various disciplines and theoretical orientations (Ahl 1990; Mueller, Gehler, and Suppan 2011; Eisenstadt 2005; Della Porta 2014), including the practitioners of game theoretic approaches to contention (Kuran 1991; Lehmann 1994; Oye 1994). Existing analyses range from micro-level studies of protest participation to sweeping accounts of regional dynamics of contention, and there is a bifurcation between studies of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of communist regimes elsewhere.

Finally, in the fourth phase, stretching from 1989 to today, the entire range of contentious behaviours characteristic of modern political regimes have appeared. Researchers who study this period come from all disciplines and employ all theoretical and methodological approaches of contemporary social science. But, in the common interest of analysing the 1989 revolutions as a whole, they are a large and diverse group in nature, some of them echo distinct theoretical claims derived from the theories of collective behaviour (Schoeberl 1965), mass society (Kornhauser 1959), or totalitarianism that were influential roughly up to the mid-1960s.

During the 1980s, but particularly after 1989, the field of study of East European contention expanded rapidly, as several distinct patterns of contention, characteristic of the increasingly divergent sub-regional situations, have emerged. Data and research opportunities have become widely available and all major theoretical orientations proposed in the field of contentious politics have made their appearance. Some authors have embedded their empirical work within other theoretical frameworks, including critical Marxism, comparative politics, historical and political sociology, or political anthropology (e.g., Ahl 1990; Berend 1993; Ekiert 1996; Kubik; 1994). At the same time, a new wave of scholars (mostly younger historians from the region) has engaged the newly opened archives and proposed novel, sometimes revisionist, historical analyses of the past and current cases of protest (McDermott and Stibbe 2006; Paczkowski 2003; Kamiński, Maliszewicz, and Ruchničewicz 2004).

Revolutions of 1989 and 1991

The revolutions of 1989 came largely as a surprise, yet the intensity of surprise varied among scholars (Turrow 1991). Those who observed Poland and the activities of underground Solidarity were arguably less startled, as they studied the country where an accumulated legacy of rebellions had earlier culminated in the Solidarity movement (1980-1981) and where, since 1981, manifold clandestine activities had periodically led to eruptions of open protest (Ahl 1985, 1986; Ciarantti 1997; Ekiert 1996; Kubik 1994). The 1989 wave of strikes, that constituted the decisive factor pushing the communist authorities to enter a path of negotiations (Paczkowski 2003).
Lehmann produced a detailed study of several waves of mobilization mostly in Leipzig, East Germany, using painstakingly collected empirical evidence and a sophisticated "dynamic threshold model" that interprets a sequence of mass protest activities as an informational cascade (1994: 49). Saular to Kozol and Karlikhs and Peterson, he emphasizes the significance of heterogeneity within the set of potential protestors. In her conceptualization there are four categories, ranging from anti-status quo extremists to pro-status quo extremists. Lehmann manages "to show that individual participation decisions may depend on changes in aggregate turnout over time because people extract benefits-cost information from turnout ratios." (1994: 91).

Opp (1994, 1998) offers the fourth influential rational choice model that tests by using survey data. The central puzzle that drives the analysis does not concern the protest participants, but rather the actions of the tyrannical regime. Opp asks why the powerful and oppressive regime failed to present the challenge in 1989, and why it had been successful earlier. The main tool such regimes rely on is repression, and Opp shows that its impact on the probability of protest is not linear; the intensifications of repression may actually encourage people to protest under certain circumstances. To argue this, and in contrast to other rational choice scholars, Opp and his colleagues (see Opp, von, and Geno 1995) assume that incentives such as public goods incentives, moral incentives ("moral indignation"), and social incentives (social pressure within friendship networks) matter, under certain circumstances, in mobilizing people for collective protest action at least as much as selective incentives. One of the key findings of this study is that the perception of the changing political environment in the Soviet Bloc had a powerful influence on the potential protestors (1994: 129).

While rational choice explanations (CARP) are prominent in the literature on 1988-89 in East Central Europe, work belonging to another research program, Synchronic Political Opportunity Structure (SPOTS) are increasingly present as well. These include the authoritative study on the role of protest in the breakup of the Soviet Union by Besaghe, who - relying on the method of event analysis - produced an exhaustive study "on the role of the contentious event in the politics of nationalism" (2003: 11) and the way the nationalist mobilizations contributed to the collapse of the Soviet system. Gorenberg (2003) used this approach to analyse minority ethnonationalist mobilisation in the Russian Federation, Gereau (2003) to examine 1989 in Poland and Czechoslovakia, and Vladisavljevic (2008) to determine the contribution of popular mobilisation to the fall of communism and the breakup of Yugoslavia.

**Post-1989 contention: empirical access, theoretical embarrassment of riches, and diverging regions**

Freedom of research that followed the fall of state socialism has attracted to the region scholars from all corners of the social sciences. They expanded the disciplinary range of the study of Eastern Europe and often engaged in productive collaborations with the earlier generation of area studies scholars. In what has become a multi-stranded literature on the post-1989 protest politics of the region we detect three approaches that had earlier helped to interpret contention in Eastern Europe. First is the line of thought indebted to critical social science, inspired by Marxism. It has produced studies on labour unions and working class protest, and on the "incentives" of post-communist transformations more generally. The second broad school belongs to comparative politics, it is focused on the role protest plays in the consolidation of post-communist political regimes and on the interaction between institutionalised and contentious forms of politics. Scholars belonging to the third group study bottom-up, popular mobilisation among specific groups and sectors of the post-1989 society, ranging from ethnic minorities, ecologists, to women and LGBT people. Their work is often anchored in the tradition of political and historical sociology and political anthropology.

**Critical social science**

Researchers continuing the tradition of critical social science often study what may be called a puzzle of low working class contentiousness. Why do workers in post-communist countries, often experiencing detrimental changes in their professional and private lives, not protest more vigorously? There are several explanations. Gerschowitz compares Eastern Europe and Latin America, observes that the transformations in the former were accompanied by less violence and contention, and concludes that the main reason for that East European "patience" is that: Comunists left behind societies lacking in the structural, institutional, and cultural factors associated with violent collective action. The lack of extreme income inequality, the smaller number of marginalized poor, the relatively lower degree of urbanization of the population, and the absence of recent, violent experiences with coups and riots may all have contributed a stabilizing influence under post-Communism. (1998: 83)

Unthorwy emphasises a different set of factors to explain the relative quiescence of workers: high levels of exit into the informal economy, the decline of unionised jobs, the ineptness of union leadership, ideological "detournement" (such as the attraction of liberal and populist ideas), but primarily well-designed governmental strategies of "divide and pacify" (2000: 137).

Crowley and their colleagues argue that the main cause of labour weakness is its "own union weakness, or what might be called a crisis of class identity, that contributes powerfully to union weakness" (2001: 7) and see this crisis as a legacy of state socialism, under which labour unions functioned mostly as "transmission belts" of communist party power. Boble and Gersho (2012) dispute some of the conclusions in Crowley and Ott (2001), particularly that unions in South Eastern Europe were created "as weak actors". They argue that in many cases they started relatively strong and only weakened over time (2012: 184-191). Ott (2000) develops the argument about Solidarity activism "betraying" their unionist identity, replacing it with nationalism and religious ideology in the process losing their effectiveness as labour's champions. Sill "second generation" argument (2014) is that labour in Eastern Europe is not particularly weak and the unions are not inconsequential (after the initial decline), though their influence is limited to the effectiveness of labour unions in Poland and the Czech Republic, and concludes that in the border the unions are less divided and more successful in defending workers' interests because they form more effective alliances with left-wing parties. Wenzel (forthcoming) studies labour union activism in Poland, particularly their protest actions, and - much like Sill - concludes that the unions have had significant influence on the course of post-communist transformations in that country. Ashwin (1999) examines the relative quiescence of the Russian working class.

Besaghe and Sase (2013), who studied the massive protest wave that swept the post-communist countries after the crisis of 2008, ask whether the end of this patience is coming. They refer to the relative quiescence of the labour class in post-communist countries. They conclude that it is context-dependent.

In Takaya's fashion, those "happy" countries that continued to experience economic growth in the midst of global crisis were all little affected by protest, while those "unhappy" countries that experienced significant economic contractions were all "unhappy" in their own ways, displaying quite varied protest responses to economic decline. (2013: 363-364)
Comparative politics: regimes, institutions, and contention

The literature in this area can be usefully grouped into four, occasionally overlapping, strands. They include studies of (1) contentious politics in new democracies (including right-wing contentious challenges to liberal democracy and protest against democratic backsliding), (2) the role of protest in semi-authoritarian and authoritarian states, (3) "colour revolutions", and (4) contention dimensions of ethnic politics. There is a group of post-communist countries at some point begun negotiating membership in the EU and eventually became members of this elite club, and made the best progress on the path of democratisation. Most work on these countries concentrates on top-down mechanisms of change, such as institutional reforms, the emergence and evolution of political systems and political parties, and the political economy of transformations. Studies of bottom-up mobilisations have been far less common. Building on an assumption that protest is a legitimate mode of political behaviour in a democracy, Ekiert and Kubik (1998a, 1998b, 1999) propose a systematic study of the role of bottom-up contention in the consolidation of democracy in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the former East Germany. Their method is event analysis based on systematic data collection from newspaper sources, often used by the scholars working within the SPOT paradigm. Other scholars of contention and democratisation studied the role of "collective" bottom-up protests in Bulgaria (Eising 2014), Romania (Margitay 2014), or, comparatively, in Hungary, Hungary, and Romania (Margitay 2015, see also Srbu 1996).

Democratic backsliding in the new EU member states has recently attracted scholarly attention, also among scholars of contention. The problem, observed at least since last year, is particularly pronounced in Hungary where the right-wing populist parties - often relying on inan...
Sociology of discontent: protests of the excluded

This literature, anchored in the historical and political sociology, is concerned with identifying, understanding and explaining patterns of mobilisation per se, and assessing their role in politics though not always explicitly their impact on regime consolidation. The studies belonging to this strand deal predominantly with contentious politics driven by identity issues, ranging from farm to religious to social orientation. Members of many social groups and categories engage in the full range of their identities and interests and/or protest against the high costs of transformations, voicing – in their judgements – their perceptions. There are works on process by farmers (Forst 2008), women (Regubka and Grabowska 2013), environmentalists (Kajanus and Carmin 2011), homeless and urban actions (Jacobson 2015), and sexual minorities (Vernon and Carmin 2006, Holzhauser 2012, O'Dwyer 2002, O'Dwyer in this volume). Some scholars have focused on the study of left-wing (often radical) movements and their weakness in post- communist Europe, for example, alterglobalists (Piotrowski 2013).

1 The Helsinki Accords (or Helsinki Final Act) were signed on 1 July 1975, at the conclusion of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. They legitimised the post-Second World War state of sovereignty (including the Soviet Union) and all satellite states and respect for human rights and basic political freedoms. From that point on, any agreements that would invoke the Accords would face with litigation.

2 Since the 1970s, two research programmes have come to dominate the field of study of contentious KARRs, as they were dubbed by Lichtblau (1998). SPOT's dominant core is structured and historical, whereas that of rational choice and game theory Sec. also Lichtblau (1995).

Bibliography


