

POL 377

TOPICS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS I

THE MAKING OF MODERN DEMOCRACY: FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Time: Tuesday, 1:00–3:00 PM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines political change in East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the present day. For our purposes, East Central Europe encompasses Germany east of the Elbe, Austria, the Czech lands, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland; we will devote more limited attention to Scandinavia, the Baltic countries, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Balkan countries. Moreover, at times we will venture outside this region to identify comparable and contrasting West European (and Russian) developments.

How are democracies created and why do they collapse? What is the relationship between democracy and capitalism? Why did early modern states take on such diverse forms, and what was the impact of these variations on subsequent trajectories of democratization and economic development? Did Eastern and Western Europe diverge politically and economically centuries ago, or is the idea of a longstanding east-west divide merely an artifact of Cold War geopolitics? Although we will read the work of historians as well as that of political scientists, this course is not a general survey of East European history; we will concentrate on (classic and more recent) theories and interpretations of state formation, democratization, and long-run economic growth. Accordingly, some prior knowledge of the broad outlines of European and global history is recommended, though not mandated.

There are no textbooks for this course. Readings will be posted to Quercus; additionally, many of the journal articles and monographs can be accessed through the University of Toronto library system. For access to e-books, see:

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/lib/utoronto/home.action>.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Evaluate competing and complementary explanations for democratization, democratic stability, and democratic breakdown, using historical evidence from multiple countries and periods.
- Identify historical legacies from different periods (old regime, nineteenth century, interwar period, state socialist) and understand their impact on present-day East Central European politics.
- Make use of historical evidence to argue your own position with respect the following questions:
 - Are capitalism and electoral democracy natural partners, or is the more-or-less happy marriage of the two in Western Europe (and elsewhere) after 1945 an historical anomaly, unlikely to be repeated?
 - Why and how did states form in medieval and early modern East Central Europe? Is state formation tantamount to the creation of a centralized, hierarchical bureaucracy, or did other processes—religious polarization, the transformation of elite social networks and structures, “social disciplining”—make an equal if not even greater contribution?
 - To what extent can we speak of a fundamental divergence between Western and Eastern Europe before the imposition of state socialism? What, exactly, diverged—political orders, cultures, agrarian social structures—and when? Is there any place for the concept of Central Europe within the “divergence” narrative?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In brief:

- Participation: 10% of total marks
- Weekly reading and lecture quizzes: 25%
- Response paper (1,500 words maximum): 30%
- Term test: 35%

In detail:

- **Participation (10%)** includes, in the first instance, attendance and active engagement with weekly lectures. Read carefully and arrive with questions to ask and/or your own ideas and interpretations to share. Be prepared to answer the instructor’s questions. If you feel uncomfortable speaking in front of the class, office hours may provide an alternative format for participation.
- **Weekly quizzes (25%)** on the content of readings and lectures will be posted to the Quercus site beginning on September 19. There will be no quiz during the spring reading week. Quizzes will post following each week’s lecture and must be completed within 24 hours: no exceptions. These are open-book quizzes, each consisting of three multiple-choice or true-false questions; once the quiz is opened, however, you will have only 15 minutes to complete it. The correct answers will not be revealed immediately upon submission; instead, I will review the results of each quiz at the beginning of the following week’s

lecture. Students are to complete the weekly quizzes individually, not in collaboration with others.

- The **response paper (30%)** will ask you to answer a question at length (1,500 words maximum) with the help of the course readings, lecture slides and notes, and in-class discussion. Your response paper should have a clearly stated, compelling thesis and a logical structure, should make use of historical evidence from multiple country cases and sources, and should anticipate and respond to plausible counterarguments. I will provide more detailed instructions, as well as the essay prompt itself, early on in the semester. The response paper is due by 9:00 AM (through Quercus) on October 31; it should be formatted in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with the word count indicated near the top of the first page.
- The **final term test (35%)** will be held during the last class session, on December 5. The test will be comprehensive, covering material from the entire course. It will consist of two parts: (1) a selection of key terms and concepts to identify, and (2) a longer response essay. Students will have two hours to complete the exam. I will provide more details about the structure and context of the term test as it approaches.

WEEKS AT A GLANCE

Week	Date	Topic	Notes
1	September 12	Europe—Eastern, Western, Central?	
2	September 19	Divergence theories	First reading quiz
3	September 26	State and regime formation to 1789	
4	October 3	Socialism, nationalism, and empire	
5	October 10	East Central Europe between the wars	
6	October 17	The coming of communism	
7	October 24	1989	
8	October 31	“The transition”	Response paper due by 9:00 AM
	November 7	<i>Fall reading week</i>	No lecture
9	November 14	After “the transition”	
10	November 21	Explaining post-1989 regime trajectories	
11	November 28	East Central Europe in global context	
12	December 5	<i>Term test</i>	

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND LECTURE TOPICS

Note: readings for each week are listed in the order in which they should be read.

1. Europe—Eastern, Western, Central? (September 12)

This week, we introduce the conceptual or “philosophic geography” of the European continent. What are the intellectual origins of the concepts of “Eastern Europe” and “Central Europe,” what political purposes have these labels served in the past, and to what extent do they remain useful today?

- Milan Kundera, “The tragedy of Central Europe,” in Gale Stokes, ed., *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe since 1945*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 217–223.
- Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), introduction and chap. 1, pp. 1–49.

2. Divergence theories (September 19)

It has often been argued that the political and economic “divergence” of Eastern and Western Europe has deep historical roots, going back to the Black Death of the fourteenth century, if not even earlier. This week, we examine several prominent social-scientific theories of East-West divergence and subject them to the scrutiny of recent historical research.

- Immanuel Wallerstein, “Three paths of national development in sixteenth-century Europe,” in *Studies in Comparative International Development* 7 (1972), pp. 95–101.
- Ronald L. Rogowski, *Shocking Contrasts: Political Responses to Exogenous Supply Shocks* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023), chap. 4, pp. 55–82.
- Markus Cerman, *Villagers and Lords in Eastern Europe, 1300–1800* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chaps. 1, 3 (selections), 5; pp. 1–9, 40–48, 94–129.

3. State and regime formation to 1789 (September 26)

What types of state structures and political regimes developed in East Central Europe in the centuries before the French Revolution? Why did the region exhibit such drastic variation in regimes—ranging from highly centralized, autocratic monarchies to decentralized, parliamentary monarchies and independent city-republics—and are we justified in speaking of a common East European political tradition all the same? Did pre-revolutionary regimes shape subsequent trajectories of democratization and economic development, and if so, how?

- Robert Frost, “Monarchy in northern and eastern Europe,” in H. M. Scott, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750: Cultures and Power* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 15, pp. 385–417.

- Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 1, pp. 1–34.
- Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresa: The Habsburg Empress in Her Time*, trans. by Robert Savage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), chap. 5 (selections), pp. 187–220 and 229–252.

4. Socialism, nationalism, and empire (October 3)

Arguably the defining feature of East European politics during the “long nineteenth century” (1789–1914) was the emergence of mass-based socialist, nationalist, and democratic political movements within vast multinational empires (specifically, the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian). This unfolded, moreover, in the context of a growing self-consciousness about the region’s economic “backwardness” relative to Western Europe. This week, we examine the politics of backwardness—real or perceived—as well as the various ways in which socialist, national, and democratic aspirations interacted to produce different political currents and ideas.

- Andrew C. Janos, “The politics of backwardness in continental Europe, 1780–1945,” in *World Politics* 41.3 (1989), pp. 325–358.
- Gale Stokes, “The social origins of East European politics,” chap. 3 in Stokes, *Three Eras of Political Change in Eastern Europe* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 36–66.
- Eric Blanc, *Revolutionary Social Democracy: Working-Class Politics across the Russian Empire, 1882–1917* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), introduction and chap. 1, pp. 1–45.

5. East Central Europe between the wars (October 10)

With the collapse (or radical reorganization, in the Russian case) of the region’s multinational empires in 1918, an entirely new political order began to take shape in East Central Europe. But most of these democratic experiments failed within a few years, giving way either to fascism or to conservative military regimes. This week, we seek to understand divergent regime outcomes between the wars: why did some East European countries revert to traditionalist dictatorship, others turn fascist, and still others manage to retain a semblance of democratic rule?

- Gregory M. Luebbert, “Social foundations of political order in interwar Europe,” in *World Politics* 39.4 (1987), pp. 449–478.
- Nancy G. Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 2, pp. 21–63.
- Piotr J. Wróbel, “The rise and fall of parliamentary democracy in interwar Poland,” chap. 5 in M. B. B. Biskupski, James S. Pula, and Wróbel, eds., *The Origins of Modern Polish Democracy* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 110–164.

6. The coming of communism (October 17)

The imposition of Soviet-style political systems and command economies on the countries of East Central Europe after 1945 has often been treated as a great homogenizing experience, reducing or even negating longstanding national and regional differences. To be sure, all state-socialist regimes in East Central Europe exhibited certain common features, but, as we shall see this week, preexisting differences across countries persisted—and perhaps even widened.

- Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: Free Press, 1992), chaps. 1–3 (selections), pp. 18–80, 89–106.
- Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), chap. 1, pp. 19–38.
- **Recommended:** Molly Pucci, “The Soviets abroad: The NKVD, intelligence, and state building in East-Central Europe after World War II,” in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 23.3 (2022), pp. 553–580.

7. 1989 (October 24)

In the space of a few months in 1989, state-socialist dictatorships disintegrated across the eastern half of the European continent. Strikingly, except in Poland and to a lesser extent in Hungary, this occurred in the absence of organized, mass-based opposition (e.g., parties, unions) to the incumbent regimes. Why did state socialism prove particularly vulnerable, instead, to more-or-less spontaneous, unorganized mass protests? And did the different modes of opposition to single-party autocracy have any consequences for the way in which the collapse occurred, or for political developments during the 1990s?

- Timur Kuran, “Now out of never: The element of surprise in the East European revolution of 1989,” in *World Politics* 44.1 (1991), pp. 7–48.
- Stephan Kotkin and Jan T. Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), chap. 1 (also skim the “Chronology”), chaps. 1, 4; pp. 5–34, 99–131.
- Gale Stokes, “Modes of opposition leading to revolution in Eastern Europe,” chap. 9 in Stokes, *Three Eras of Political Change in Eastern Europe* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 161–180.

8. “The transition” (October 31)

The words on (almost) everyone’s lips during the 1990s were “the transition”—from single-party autocracy and the command economy to capitalist democracy. This was seen as an unprecedented challenge: not only would East European polities have to construct market economies and integrate themselves into a rapidly changing international order, but they would have to do while simultaneously building and maintaining democratic institutions. This week, we focus on the political economy of the transition. In particular, why was the political backlash against rapid marketization, which many expected to quickly reverse the market reforms, so ineffectual almost everywhere? We also ask how to classify the types of capitalist economies that have emerged in East Central Europe since 1989.

- Claus Offe, “Capitalism by democratic design? Democratic theory facing the triple transition in East Central Europe,” in *Social Research* 58.4 (1991), pp. 865–892.
- Hilary Appel and Mitchell A. Orenstein, *From Triumph to Crisis: Neoliberal Economic Reform in Postcommunist Countries* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chap. 1, pp. 1–32.
- Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, “Neoliberalism, embedded neoliberalism and neocorporatism: Towards transnational capitalism in Central-Eastern Europe,” in *West European Politics* 30.3 (2007), pp. 443–466.

9. After “the transition” (November 14)

By the early 2000s, the core countries of East Central Europe—Poland, Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia—appeared to have completed “the transition” to democracy and the market. After the global financial crisis of 2008, however, the whole intellectual architecture of “transition” scholarship was thrown into chaos, for the endpoint of transition—stable, prosperous market democracy—now appears to be increasingly unstable in Western Europe itself, and indeed almost everywhere. What forms has politics in East Central Europe taken since the transition? Why has an illiberal, authoritarian political style come to the forefront, and are there meaningful variations beneath the surface resemblances?

- Béla Greskovits, “The hollowing and backsliding of democracy in East Central Europe,” in *Global Policy* 6 supp. 1 (Jun. 2015), pp. 28–37.
- Béla Greskovits, “Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through conquering civil society: The Civic Circles movement,” in *East European Politics* 36.2 (2020), pp. 247–266.
- Petra Guasti and Lenka Bustikova, “Varieties of illiberal backlash in Central Europe,” in *Problems of Post-Communism* 70.2 (2023), pp. 130–142.

10. Explaining post-1989 regime trajectories (November 21)

Having examined the key political developments in post-1989 East Central Europe over the past two weeks, we now consider them in longer-run historical perspective. What can account for variations in the stability and resilience of democracy within the region over the past three decades? Should we look to communist or even to pre-communist legacies to make sense of such variation? Or can we find a better explanation in more proximate factors?

- Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), chap. 8, pp. 284–305.
- Keith Darden and Anna Grzymala-Busse, “The great divide: Literacy, nationalism, and the communist collapse,” in *World Politics* 59.1 (2006), pp. 83–115.
- Antoaneta L. Dimitrova, “The uncertain road to sustainable democracy: Elite coalitions, citizen protests and the prospects of sustainable democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” in *East European Politics* 34.3 (2018), pp. 257–275.

11. East Central Europe in global context (November 28)

What is East Central Europe's place in the world today? This week, we wrap up the course by considering how countries in the region are facing up to a variety of global problems: the middle-income trap, the resurgence of "patrimonial" styles of government, the continued fallout from the pandemic, and, above all, the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

- Dóra Györffy, "The middle-income trap in Central and Eastern Europe in the 2010s: Institutions and divergent growth models," in *Comparative European Politics* 20 (2022), pp. 90–113.
- Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein, "Understanding the global patrimonial wave," in *Perspectives on Politics* 20.1 (2022), pp. 237–249.
- R. Daniel Kelemen, "The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium," *Journal of European Public Policy* 27.3 (2020), pp. 481–499.
- Veronica Anghel and Erik Jones, "Is Europe really forged through crisis? Pandemic EU and the Russia-Ukraine war," in *Journal of European Public Policy* 30.4 (2023), pp. 766–786.

12. Term test (December 5)

More details to follow.

COURSE POLICIES

Office hours: No appointment is needed for regular office hours. If you cannot make my regular office hours due to a scheduling conflict but would like to meet, email me to set up an appointment. I cannot guarantee that I will be available to meet outside of regular office hours.

Email correspondence: Consult the syllabus, Quercus course site, and other course documentation before contacting me with questions. Email correspondence should be reserved for organizational questions; substantive questions about the course material are best addressed to me in lecture or office hours.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be dealt with accordingly. For further information and clarification, examine the University of Toronto's policies on plagiarism (<https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/>). This course uses antiplagiarism software.

Anti-plagiarism software: Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Extensions: Workload-related extensions may be granted under extraordinary circumstances. I will only consider requests for workload-related extensions made during office hours, not those submitted by email. I will not consider workload-related extension requests made less than one week before the assignment due date.

Late and missed assignments: Late papers will be subject to a penalty of 5% (of total marks for the assignment) per calendar day. This includes weekends. In other words, a response paper submitted the day after the deadline cannot receive a grade higher than 95%; a paper submitted two days after the deadline cannot receive a grade higher than 90%, and so on. Papers submitted five or more calendar days after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, as will any work handed in after the assignment in question has been returned to the class. I will not make accommodations for late registration in the course.

Accessibility needs: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, feel free to approach me and Accessibility Services (<https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/contact-us>) as soon as possible. You must contact Accessibility Services before 5:00 PM on Friday, October 14, to request accommodations for the final exam period. I cannot grant accommodations after this deadline.

Recording of lectures: This course, including your participation, will be recorded on video and will be available to students in the course for viewing remotely and after each session. Course videos and materials belong to your instructor, the University, and/or other sources depending on the specific facts of each situation, and are protected by copyright. Do not download, copy, or share any course or student materials or videos without the explicit permission of the instructor. For questions about recording and use of videos in which you appear please contact your instructor.

Equity statement: The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As an instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behavior that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns you may contact the U of T Equity and Diversity officer.