

After the Collapse of Communism

Comparative Lessons of Transition

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Sabon 10/13 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

After the collapse of communism : comparative lessons of post communist transition /
edited by Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss.

p. cm.

“This collection of essays is the result of a conference convened at Princeton University
marking the ten year anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union.”

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-83484-8 (cloth)

1. Europe, Eastern – Politics and government – 1989 – Congresses. 2. Former Soviet
republics – Politics and government – Congresses. 3. Russia (Federation) – Politics and
government – 1991 – Congresses. 4. Post communism – Europe, Eastern – Congresses.
5. Post communism – Former Soviet republics – Congresses. 6. Post communism –
Russia. (Federation) – Congresses. 7. Democracy – Europe, Eastern – Congresses.
8. Democracy – Former Soviet republics – Congresses. 9. Democracy – Russia
(Federation) – Congresses. I. McFaul, Michael, 1963– II. Stoner-Weiss,
Kathryn, 1965–

JN96.A58A34 2005

320.947'09'049 – dc22

2004040737

ISBN 0 521 83484 8 hardback

Contents

<i>Contributors</i>	<i>page</i>	vii
Introduction: The Evolving Social Science of Postcommunism <i>Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss</i>	I	
1 The Triumph of Nation-States: Lessons from the Collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia <i>Philip G. Roeder</i>	21	
2 The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World <i>Michael McFaul</i>	58	
3 Circumstances versus Policy Choices: Why Has the Economic Performance of the Soviet Successor States Been So Poor? <i>Vladimir Popov</i>	96	
4 Whither the Central State? The Regional Sources of Russia's Stalled Reforms <i>Kathryn Stoner-Weiss</i>	130	
5 Parties, Citizens, and the Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Russia <i>Timothy J. Colton</i>	173	
6 Comparative Democratization: Lessons from Russia and the Postcommunist World <i>Valerie Bunce</i>	207	

7	Russians as Joiners: Realist and Liberal Conceptions of Postcommunist Europe <i>James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul</i>	232
	<i>Index</i>	257

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Introduction

The Evolving Social Science of Postcommunism

Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss

This volume is the product of a conference, entitled *Ten Years since the Collapse of the Soviet Union: Comparative Lessons and Perspectives*, held at Princeton University in the autumn of 2000. The genesis of the conference lay in our shared belief that the study of the formerly communist world had much to offer comparative politics, but that few if any volumes actually had yet attempted to explore what these contributions might be. We wanted to move away from the often shrill debate between area specialists and general comparativists toward a more constructive blending of comparative political science and the best of area specialization. As a result, we gathered together a distinguished group of scholars pursuing research in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union within a distinctly comparative framework.

In producing this volume, we set out to answer three questions: First, more than ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the initiation of sweeping economic, social, and political change in the post-Soviet states, what have we learned? Second, how are we to understand theoretically the complicated and multidimensional components of triple transitions? Finally, what new theoretical insights into democratization, political economy, and state formation does the post-Soviet transition experience offer the study of comparative politics and international relations more generally?

We began our project with the assumption that “change” was the generic dependent variable in need of explanation. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new polities and economies in the former Soviet space constitute a rare turning point in world history. Revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union fundamentally

altered the borders of the states in the region, the internal organization of the economies of these states, and political and social institutions of the communist world. After nearly a century during which competition between authoritarian communism and democratic capitalism divided and polarized the international system, internal changes within the Soviet Union have transformed international relations in Europe and Asia as well as relations between East and West.

Or did they? Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, action verbs and motion adjectives have dominated descriptions of events in the postcommunist world. Yet, more than ten years later, what is most striking about the region as a whole is the resultant mix of change *and* continuity and the variation that this mix gives to different kinds of outcomes. Some states have disappeared entirely (the Soviet Union, East Germany), others have divided (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia), and others remain intact but marked by deep internal changes and conflicts (Russia, Kazakhstan, Georgia). The economies of some postcommunist states have moved far from their formerly planned systems, while others have moved scarcely at all, and still others appear to have settled into an awkward mix of plan and market. Likewise, the number of political systems that bear resemblance to the authoritarian ways of the Soviet Union is as pronounced as the number of polities that have little in common with the old system. The region is rich in different outcomes in different issue areas. David Laitin has written that explaining these varied outcomes would qualify as “quintessential questions on the comparative political agenda.”¹ Some of these outcomes fit social science theory derived from experiences in other contexts, whereas others challenge conventional understandings of social, political, and economic change.

In the decade since the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars have come to realize that comparative political theory adds a great deal to our understanding of the great changes that have taken place in the former Soviet space. But although the similarities between the post-Soviet transition and those of Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa offer confirmation of some generalizations about change, the differences between the post-Soviet transition and others offer post-Soviet scholars the opportunity to challenge and revise long-held theories. Thus, the study of the former Soviet Union has not and should not simply borrow comparative politics theory and apply it haphazardly in an awkward attempt

¹ David Laitin, “Comparative Politics: The State of the Discipline,” APSA Paper, August 2000, p. 3.

to explain transitional outcomes there. Rather, post-Soviet politics has served and should serve to further the agenda of comparative politics more generally. We hope that the group of authors and essays we have assembled here will reflect this empirical fact and normative mission.

THE BEGINNING OR THE END OF HISTORY?

An additional and related consideration that motivated our development of this collection of essays is one of time. We view the twentieth century as neatly bracketed by two seminal social experiments: the establishment of a socialist state in the Soviet Union beginning in 1917 and the demise of the Soviet state in December 1991. The first event – the Bolshevik Revolution – fundamentally altered the way states were organized and their interaction with each other. In reaction to this historical event, the social sciences also developed new theories and paradigms, including the study of comparative political systems, bipolarity in international relations, and Marxism, a school of thought that permeated western social sciences for nearly a half century.² The second event – the collapse of the Soviet Union – was no less consequential for world history. The event extinguished peacefully the fifty-year-old bipolar international system. The event also punctuated the end of communism as an ideological, political, and economic alternative to western democracy and capitalism. History, of course, did not end in 1991, but it did take a decisive turn away from concepts and regimes that were considered enduring and permanent just a decade earlier. Since the Soviet Union's collapse in December 1991, the post-Soviet world has gone through the twists and turns of tumultuous political, economic, and social change.

The consequences of the Soviet collapse for American social science, however, have been less dramatic than was the beginning of Soviet communism in 1917.³ Explaining the end of communist regimes and international bipolarity should have been one of the fundamental research projects of the last decade. Surprisingly, it has not achieved such prominence. In the initial moments after the collapse of the USSR, non-Soviet specialists berated the field of Sovietology for failing to predict collapse.⁴

² Some will object to the suggestion that Marxist theory was in any way related to the rise of the Soviet Union. The correlation between the dissolution of the USSR and the decline in Marxist studies, however, is striking and robust.

³ The event had dramatic consequences for Soviet and Russian social sciences.

⁴ For one of the most scathing attacks, see Martin Malia, "From under the Rubble, What?" *Problems of Communism*, January–April 1992, pp. 89–106. See also the essays in Michael

Those noncommunist specialists focused on the future and promised to save the theoretically depraved subfield of Soviet-area studies. The “transitologists” were particularly imperial and messianic in promising to bring the good news of the word of their theoretical insights to Soviet-area specialists. As Karl and Schmitter wrote, “The neophyte practitioners of transitology and consolidology have tended to regard the implosion of the Soviet Union and the regime changes in eastern Europe with ‘imperial intent.’ These changes seem to offer a tempting opportunity to incorporate (at long last) the study of these countries within the general corpus of comparative analysis.”⁵

The impact of this neocolonial challenge was profound within the Soviet – and soon to be named “post-Soviet” – field. Some scholars simply stopped publishing. Numerous young scholars interrupted their careers and postponed empirical inquiries to learn quantitative and game theoretic tools. The field of post-Soviet studies was effectively on probation before the rest of the social sciences community.

Strikingly, however, more than a decade later the integration of post-Sovietology into the mainstream of political science is far from complete. At the same time, the mainstream of social science – despite earlier promises of rescue – has done little to address the new problems introduced by the demise of the Soviet Union. With important exceptions, the more senior Soviet scholars have not adapted new theories and tools of

Cox, *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology and the Death of Communism and the New Russia* (London: Pinter, 1998); and the essays in Part 2 of the special issue of *The National Interest* called “The Strange Death of Soviet Communism: An Autopsy,” No. 31, Spring 1993. For a comprehensive response, see George Breslauer, “In Defense of Sovietology,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (July–September 1992), pp. 197–238.

⁵ Philippe Schmitter with Terry Lynn Karl, “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far East Should They Attempt to Go?” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring 1994), p. 177; and Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl, “The Types of Democracy Emerging in Southern and Eastern Europe and South and Central America,” in Peter Volten, ed., *Bound to Change: Consolidating Democracy in East Central Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 43. For “anticolonial” responses, see Valerie Bunce, “Regional Differences in Democratization: The East Versus the South,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1998), pp. 187–211; Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists Be Grounded?” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 111–27; Roger Markwick, “A Discipline in Transition? From Sovietology to ‘Transitology,’” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 1996), pp. 255–76; Thomas Remington, “Regime Transition in Communist Systems: The Soviet Case,” *Soviet Economy*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1990); and Michael McFaul, “Revolutionary Transformations in Comparative Perspective: Defining a Post-Communist Research Agenda,” in David Holloway and Norman Naimark, eds., *Reexamining the Soviet Experience: Essays in Honor of Alexander Dallin* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 167–96.

social science to the study of their geographical terrain.⁶ Younger scholars have adapted, but their research still struggles for attention in the mainstream of political science. Amazingly, the leading journal in political science, the *American Political Science Review*, has published no more than a handful of articles on postcommunism in the past ten years!

In addition, with a few exceptions, the more robust subdisciplines of political science have given relatively little attention to theory development regarding the extinction of communism and the emergence of postcommunism.⁷ Peter Ordeshook may be the only major rational choice theorist to devote major attention to postcommunism, and he emerged from his inquiry thoroughly discouraged about the applicability of rational choice analysis to the questions that arise from this field. Others simply ignore the post-Soviet cases altogether as a way to protect the validity of their findings derived from other regional studies (including, most importantly, American-area studies). International relations theorists have devoted more time to explaining systemic change in the international system, but only slightly more. Since 1991 – the formative years in the birth of new formerly communist nations – states, economies, polities, and regional systems have both challenged and confirmed many of our assumptions about comparative politics and international relations. Yet social scientific inquiry about these new polities has remained marginal to the core of American political science.⁸

When the new cases from the postcommunist world of economic, political, and international change are analyzed, the dominant research method deployed has been to confirm or disconfirm extant theories. This research design is useful and important, as many of the chapters in this book

⁶ Some exceptions include Timothy Colton, *Transitional Citizens: Voters and What Influences Them in the New Russia* (Harvard University Press, 2000); Tom Remington and Steve Smith, *The Politics of Institutional Choice: The Formation of the Russian State Duma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Philip Roeder, *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Specialists in Eastern Europe did not have to “adapt” as much, since they were always better versed in the theories of comparative politics and international relations than were those who study the Soviet Union.

⁷ Exceptions include Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁸ Despite the virtual elimination of comparative economics as a subdiscipline at many major universities, the economists have devoted much more time and energy to understanding the transitional economies. Whole journals have been devoted to the subject, and major mainstream journals and leading economists have devoted space and time to the subject.

demonstrate. However, it can also be limited. Why, for instance, should a theory of federalism developed from an analysis of a stable, static case like the United States be used to explain the formation of center-regional relations in new states emerging from a collapsed unitary state? Why should theories of party development developed from analyses of nineteenth-century party systems in Western Europe be deployed to explain the original formation of interest group politics in twenty-first-century, postcommunist Russia? More generally, why should theories of equilibria be the bases of theory development about phenomena fundamentally out of equilibria?

BETWEEN AREA STUDIES AND PHYSICS

The fact that Soviet and post-Soviet studies have been on the defensive for the past decade at the same time that a serious infusion of new theories of change from comparative politics were lacking have seriously impeded the development of grand theories.⁹ Instead of simply defending area studies or accepting full stop the aim of fitting research on this region into established theories, postcommunism needs to carve a middle ground of theoretically and empirically based research.

The original blow to the Sovietological field, in fact, should never have been accepted as a blow at all. Static and evolutionary models, like most theories in political science, dominated Sovietology before the collapse. Many theorists have posited that unexpected change cannot be, and therefore should not be, accounted for by theory. Kenneth Waltz has gone so far as to assert that theories should not even *aspire* to explain change because “a theory explains continuities. It tells one what to expect and why to expect it. Within a system, a theory explains recurrences and repetitions, not change.”¹⁰ Consequently, our most robust theories often seek to explain “nonevents” – why the rules of the U.S. Congress “make public policy stable and predictable when it might be expected to be arbitrary”¹¹; why countries do not go to war even when the anarchy of the international system permits if not encourages them to do so; or why totalitarian

⁹ Although perhaps focused on a different set of causes, David Laitin makes a similar observation about the field in his “Post-Soviet Politics,” *American Review of Political Science*, Vol. 3 (2000), pp. 117–48.

¹⁰ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 69.

¹¹ Robert Bates, “Macropolitical Economy in the Field of Development,” in James Alt and Kenneth Shepsle, eds., *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 46.

and authoritarian political systems do not collapse even when they are inefficient. Explaining change to these systems in equilibrium – be it the Gingrich “revolution” in 1994, the collapse of the bipolar international system in 1989, or the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991 – is beyond the domain of these static theories in *all* of these subdisciplines.

Yet, Soviet scholars have been held accountable. The “failure” to predict the Soviet collapse produced real self-doubt within the Soviet discipline. Amazingly, more than ten years after the collapse, scholars still do not even have a shared definition of what we have witnessed in the region. Russian change/continuity is an example of what exactly? Revolution or merely reform? Democratization or merely a transition to some yet unknown endpoint? Without some common understanding of the phenomenon in question, it remains difficult to develop explanatory theories.

Two intellectual responses have resulted. At one extreme, students of the region make the claim that Russia is unique. Theories developed to explain other countries do not apply to this riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.¹² And if they do apply, it will take decades before we know how to apply them. In the interim, observers of Russia are encouraged to collect data. At the other extreme, scholars try to demonstrate that Russia is similar to other countries and therefore theories derived from the study of these other countries can and must be applied to the Russian case. Because most theories in American social science have their origins in the study of the United States, these scholars usually end up applying models built around the American case – be it models of federalism, executive–legislative relations, or fiscal stability – to illuminate similar phenomena or expose dissimilar phenomena in Russia and the other new states of the former Soviet Union. This group of scholars tends to avoid grand theory and resist explaining the entire “case” of change, but focuses instead on smaller questions and puzzles.

The consequences of both of these research strategies is that hardly anyone is trying to explain the big picture of change in Russia, let alone the entire postcommunist region. This failure to “think big” – a failure to place change in Russia in its proper context, to seek to develop new theories about change rather than just borrowing old theories – is understandable, but nonetheless regrettable. Those clinging to the notion that the Russian case is *sui generis* risk being pushed to the margins of social science. But those carving the Russian case into small enough pieces to

¹² Stephen Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York: Norton, 2000).

make the phenomena in question look generic also do an injustice to the magnitude and nature of the changes that we are witnessing in this part of the world.

Despite notable differences in context, Russian politicians should hope that their work today will produce an economy and polity that could be compared productively with stable systems in other countries. In the scholarly community, social scientists studying the region cannot forever be defined by one historical data point – the end of communism. Historians, not political scientists, use such markers to delineate their subfields. Yet, many of the essays in this book suggest that it is too early to subsume things Russian (or Uzbek) into the static models of mainstream political science. Rather, while the data are still “lying in the streets,” scholars should be attempting to frame change in Russia and perhaps in other postcommunist countries as well as a dynamic, sometimes unique phenomenon nonetheless worthy of theorizing.¹³

This book makes the case for understanding postcommunist regime change as an analytically useful category, which should be considered comparable to but distinct from other kinds of regimes and/or regimes in transition. This is not to argue that other kinds and levels of theory should not be deployed to understand outcomes in and affected by these regimes. All the essays in this book are grounded in contemporary theoretical debates in the social sciences. However, importation of theories derived – whether inductively or deductively – from analyses of other kinds of regimes must take into account the specific features of the Soviet/Russian case and postcommunism more generally.

Two basic assumptions in tension with each other provide the basis for this argument. First, not all change is evolutionary.¹⁴ Some changes, arguably many of the most important changes in regime development, are rapid and abrupt. Revolutions – the simultaneous change in the polity and economy – are the rarest but most transformative kind of regime change. Theories, models, and metaphors derived from static phenomena or evolutionary change, therefore – such as democratization, modernization, rational choice, or learning – are not adequate for explaining

¹³ For more refined arguments as to why, see Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists be Grounded?”

¹⁴ A corollary to this hypothesis is that states, regimes, and institutions are not constantly changing in an evolutionary manner to meet the needs and demands of their environments. Rather, they can remain static, to be changed only by *rapid*, revolutionary disruptions. See Stephen Krasner, “Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics,” *Comparative Politics* (1984), p. 216.

revolutionary change. Incremental changes may have been influential, if not necessary, for precipitating revolutionary disruptions. But once this critical threshold has been reached, the kinds of outcomes to be predicted from revolutionary change are different from those that result from evolutionary change.¹⁵

The kind of change that has unfolded in the Soviet Union/Russia and perhaps in the entire former communist world stands as compelling evidence for this first hypothesis. The Russian state and the surrounding states from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have undergone monumental political, economic, and social change in the past several years, rivaled only by the French Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution in scope or consequence.¹⁶ The old Soviet polity, consisting of a state subordinated to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was destroyed. In the vacuum, new political institutions are emerging in some states, including elected parliaments and executives, a separation of power between the legislature and the executive, and several political parties. Simultaneously, new patterns of autocracy are taking shape in other new states. The final endpoints of these political transformations are still uncertain. Likewise, the old Soviet command economy in which virtually all production and distribution were controlled by the party-state also has collapsed. In some new states, the old is being replaced by a new system based on private property, free prices, and market forces. In other new states, hybrid institutional arrangements between the state and market have consolidated. In all cases, however, *Soviet* communism is being replaced by various shades of new economic institutions. Theories developed to explain static events or evolutionary change, therefore, will be inadequate to explain these rapid and simultaneous transformations of both the polity and economy of Russia and other postcommunist states.

A second assumption is that history matters; change is path-dependent. The political and socioeconomic institutions that comprise a regime are the consequence of historical processes. As Robert Putnam cogently summarized,

Whatever other factors may affect their form, institutions have inertia and “robustness.” They therefore embody historical trajectories and turning points.

¹⁵ Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

¹⁶ Although much of the following discussion also pertains to other states of the former Soviet Union as well as the former socialist states of Eastern Europe, this essay focuses on Russia alone.

History matters because it is “path dependent”: what comes first (even if it was in some sense “accidental”) conditions what comes later. Individuals may “choose” their institutions, but they do not choose them under circumstances of their own making, and their choices in turn influence the rules within which their successors choose.¹⁷

Even during periods of revolutionary change when new rulers make a conscious attempt to break with the past, the path of transformation is still influenced by past decisions, institutions, and organizations of socioeconomic relations.

The Russian case and the universe of cases comprising changing communist regimes also offers confirmation of this second hypothesis. In particular, the mostly peaceful method of change has magnified the influence of the old on the new in these transformations. The peaceful process by which Russia has moved toward creating this new Russian polity and economy has left in place many formal and informal Soviet institutions. As Kenneth Jowitt has remarked,

any substantial analysis of democracy’s and market capitalism’s chances in Eastern Europe must interpret the maelstrom itself, and that means coming to analytical grips with the cultural, political, and economic “inheritance” of forty years of Leninist rule. For Western analysts to treat the Leninist legacy the way Leninists after 1948 treated their own East European inheritance – namely as a collection of historically outmoded “survivals” bound to lose their cultural, social, and psychological significance – would be an intellectual mistake of the first order.¹⁸

Not everything from the past, however, is consequential for the future. If it were, there would be no change. The analyst’s task is not to assert the existence of a communist legacy. Rather, we must specify under what conditions certain practices from the past matter for contemporary outcomes and under what conditions legacies are unimportant. Theories of political and economic change that do not treat institutions and organizations constructed during the communist era as a potential independent variable – whether explicit or implicit – cannot explain or hope to aid the logic of change unfolding in these postcommunist regimes. Undoubtedly, the organization of communist totalitarian and posttotalitarian regimes influenced the beginning of transformation, the mode of transformation,

¹⁷ Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 8. See also Krasner, “Approaches to the State,” p. 225.

¹⁸ Kenneth Jowitt, *The New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1992), p. 286.

and the type of postcommunist consolidation to emerge in these instances of regime change.

ADVANCING SOCIAL SCIENCE RATHER THAN DEFENDING TERRITORY

With these assumptions about rapid change *and* (however paradoxical) path dependency in mind, theorists about the postcommunist world should be prepared to contribute to broader social science theory without abandoning altogether those features (and thus theoretical arguments) unique to the postcommunist world. Some outcomes in postcommunist politics are consistent with extant theories in political science. Others are not. This simple observation about variation must be the starting point for theoretical inquiry in the postcommunist world. Old theories should be applied to new cases as a method of developing theory, but only if the champions of old paradigms are willing to listen, interpret, and argue with the results of these applications.

In organizing this volume, we did not aim to take stock of all predicted and curious outcomes in the postcommunist world over the last decade. Nor did we aspire to conduct a literature review of all the important work published on the post-Soviet experience.¹⁹ We also did not seek to discuss every topic in postcommunism, nor did we ask twenty-seven scholars to write about twenty-seven cases of regime change.²⁰ Nor did we invite seven people to write specifically on a single issue like democratization, although the issues of transition and change are themes that run through all of the essays.²¹

Instead, we wanted to encourage comparison of what we think are central issues of the past ten years across the postcommunist space. We

¹⁹ For such a review, see Laitin, "Post-Soviet Politics."

²⁰ For a survey of all topics related to Russia, see Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). The best complete survey of all postcommunist regimes is in Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Amanda Schnetzer, *Nations in Transit 2001: Civil Society, Democracy and Markets in East Central Europe and the Newly Independent States* (New York: Transaction Books, 2001).

²¹ Excellent volumes organized this way include Richard Anderson, M. Steven Fish, Stephen Hanson, and Philip Roeder, *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Zoltan Barany and Robert Moser, eds., *Russian Politics: Challenges to Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Harry Eckstein, Frederic Fléron, Erik Hoffman, and William Reisinger, *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia? Exploration in State-Society Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

assembled a distinguished group of authors with intimate knowledge of different aspects of the transition process and invited them to write about what they know best and what they have learned from the last ten years of tumultuous change in the former Soviet Union. At the same time, we believe that the topics discussed in this volume are also central to political science and thereby offer us a way to demonstrate the degree to which post-Soviet studies has not only integrated into the mainstream of comparative politics but also helped to shape theoretical debates. As a result, this book is a sampler, not an encyclopedia, of some of the most interesting theoretical and empirical work on postcommunism in the last decade.

SEVEN SAMPLES

In Chapter 1, Philip Roeder examines the triumph of nation-states in the postcommunist world at a time when the concept of the nation-state is under serious assault from the forces of globalization. Roeder notes that social science offers two approaches that might explain the success of these nation-state projects in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union. The first is a nationalist argument regarding popular demands for self-determination. The second argument, derived from the international relations literature, posits that the nation-state triumphs as a result of international pressures that favor this institutional framework over a multinational alternative. Roeder argues, however, that neither of these approaches satisfactorily explains the postcommunist outcomes that he examines. He posits instead that the postcommunist transition to twenty-eight nation-states where nine states once stood resulted from “the failure of segmental political incorporation of ethnic groups by the former communist regime.” Thus Roeder links the creation of new nation-states to the political institutions of the old regime – particularly that of ethnofederalism.

Roeder’s chapter is notable not only for its grand historical sweep and fresh empirical data, but also for his careful assessment of the relative inadequacies of comparative social science explanations for the triumph of nation-states in the former Soviet bloc. In arguing for the influence of institutional legacies – like the segmental incorporation of ethnic groups into federations of homelands – Roeder properly emphasizes the importance of the communist institutional legacy in explaining unanticipated postcommunist outcomes.

In Chapter 2, Michael McFaul moves the discussion from why nation-states emerged in the postcommunist context to the different types of regimes that have emerged to govern these new nation-states. The transition from communism in Europe and the former Soviet Union has only sometimes produced a transition to democracy. Since the crumbling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, twenty-eight states – most of them new states – have abandoned communism. But only nine have entered the ranks of liberal democracies as assessed by Freedom House. The remaining majority of new postcommunist states are various shades of dictatorships or unconsolidated “transitional regimes.” Why did some states abandon communism for democracy, while others opted for authoritarian rule?

McFaul’s chapter provides an answer. In endorsing actor-centric approaches that have dominated analyses of the third wave of democratization, he nonetheless challenges the central hypothesis of the earlier literature concerning the relationship between the mode of transition and the resulting regime type. His essay offers an alternative set of causal paths from *ancien regime* to new regime, which can account for both democracy and dictatorship as outcomes. In his view, situations of *unequal* distributions of power produced the quickest and most stable transitions from communist rule. In countries with asymmetrical balances of power, the regime to emerge depends almost entirely on the ideological orientation of the most powerful. In countries where democrats enjoyed a decisive power advantage, democracy emerged. Institutions of power sharing or checks and balances did not result from compromise between the *ancien regime* and democratic challengers. Rather, they only emerged if the hegemonic democrats chose to implement them. Ideas – democratic ideas embraced by powerful political actors – played a central role in the creation of postcommunist democracies. Conversely, in countries in which dictators maintained a decisive power advantage, dictatorship emerged. Between these two extremes were countries in which the distribution of power between the old regime and its challengers was relatively equal. Rather than producing stalemate, compromise, and pacted transitions to democracy, however, such situations in the postcommunist world resulted in protracted confrontation between relatively balanced powers. The regimes that emerged from these modes of transitions are not the most successful democracies, but rather unconsolidated, unstable, partial democracies.

Chapter 3, by Vladimir Popov, takes on the politics of postcommunist economic reform. Popov’s masterful essay first explains why the economic

performance in the states of the former Soviet Union was so poor compared to East European countries, China, and Vietnam. Popov argues that conventional explanations regarding the dynamics of economic output during transitions that are associated with the speed and depth of liberalization (measured by liberalization indices), and with the success or failure in macroeconomic stabilization (measured by the rates of inflation), do not hold.²² After controlling for nonpolicy factors – such as the level of development, pretransition industrial structure, and trade patterns – the impact of liberalization becomes insignificant. However, variations in inflation rates and institutional capacities of the state (as measured by the change in the share of government revenues in GDP and/or by the ratio of the rule of law to the democracy index) remain important determinants of performance. According to Popov, these factors explain the vast majority of differences in GDP change in twenty-eight transition economies. Popov contends, therefore, that the debate between shock therapists and gradualists that dominated discussions throughout the 1990s was misguided. The crux of the debate – the speed of transition – turned out to be a secondary issue for later economic performance. However, gradualists and shock therapists alike overlooked the key variable – the strength of institutions.

In the second part of the essay, Popov focuses on factors influencing the choice of “good” and “bad” economic policies, examining in particular the rationale behind the “bad” economic policy choices. The argument here is that the political economy of transition imposed constraints, similar to those observed in Latin American countries, and resulted in an inefficient import substitution industrial strategy and macroeconomic instability, in Russia in particular.

At the start of the transition period, after the deregulation of prices, former socialist countries experienced a dramatic and quick increase in personal income inequalities and sectoral inequalities in the profitability of enterprises. Previously, under authoritarian regimes, the state had been strong enough to mitigate these inequalities by imposing a substantial burden of transfers on producers. Strong democratic governments in Central European countries were able to do both – to eliminate part of the subsidies and to finance the remainder overtly. In contrast, the weak democratic governments that emerged in the postcommunist era in many

²² For a statement of these “conventional” arguments, see Anders Aslund, *Building Capitalism: The Transformation of the Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

of the successor states of the former Soviet Union were not in a position to maintain large-scale subsidies. Consequently, they had to choose between eliminating the bulk of all subsidies and finding alternative ways of financing these subsidies (e.g., import substitution-oriented price controls, inflationary financing, building up domestic and foreign debt, maintaining the overvalued exchange rate, driving foreign borrowing up and/or foreign exchange reserves down). The first choice was politically dangerous, the second economically inefficient. The inability to cut subsidies inherited from the era of central planning was the major reason for an import substitution industrial policy and macroeconomic instability – budget deficits, inflation, increased domestic and foreign indebtedness, and overvalued exchange rates. All of these factors, in Popov's view, eventually led to Russia's 1998 currency crisis – a crisis that affected the entire CIS region. Just as Roeder and McFaul note, lingering legacies from the Soviet era had real consequences for the emergence of new practices a decade later.

Chapters 4 and 5, by Kathryn Stoner-Weiss and Timothy Colton respectively, examine specific problems inherent to Russia's transition over the last decade and offer theoretical insight to transitional regimes more generally. Stoner-Weiss makes the claim that weak central state capacity in implementing policy has produced a decade of partial reforms at best, failed reforms at worst. She argues that the national government's inability to ensure reliable policy coherence and implementation across the eighty-nine constituent units of the Russian Federation has left it unable to deliver to society many basic goods and services guaranteed by the constitution and federal laws. This inability, in turn, is at least partially a consequence of the underinstitutionalization of the state and state-society relationships.

Stoner-Weiss argues that Russia is a particularly striking example of a more general problem in transitional contexts. In countries that are entering a time of great change (postrevolution or postcollapse), the promise and hope for a new or renewed state's abilities are great, and yet so often the state proves to be weak and incapable of improving or changing the lives of the people it governs. Sometimes, despite the best of intentions, new weak states make life even worse.²³ Under what conditions does this outcome occur? Stoner-Weiss uses the Russian case to present some general arguments about the cycle of weak state capacity in developing countries even in the face of relatively weak societies.

²³ Joel Migdal makes a similar point in his *Strong States and Weak Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. xx.