

The Politics of Postcommunist Eastern Europe

Professor Conor O'Dwyer

Email: PLEASE EMAIL ME WITHIN THE CANVAS SYSTEM!

MWF 10:40-11:30, Anderson 101

Office Hours: W 2:00-3:30pm and by appointment in Anderson 332

I. Description

This class will provide a survey of the politics of postcommunist Eastern Europe, from the emergence of national states in the interwar period through their accession to the European Union, and the specter of democratic backsliding since. Just as the collapse of the region's communist regimes took social scientists by surprise in 1989, so too has the divergence of political and economic trajectories since. In some countries, democratic institutions were swiftly consolidated. In others, initial gains have been reversed and "illiberal democracies" are taking shape. Likewise in the economic sphere, outcomes have varied widely: while some governments quickly managed difficult reforms and laid the conditions for growth, others faced extended economic stagnation. Finally, a number of the region's states have joined the European Union and NATO, a process that, arguably, has deepened democracy and cemented economic reforms even as it adds new complexity to the postcommunist transition. Most recently, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has destabilized security for the whole region. In short, the range of outcomes in postcommunist Europe makes the region an ideal laboratory for testing the explanatory power of major theories of comparative politics. Our survey of political and economic developments in this region will cover democratization and political participation; privatization and macroeconomic reform; nationalism and ethnic conflict; as well as regional integration. Though we will cover the whole region, the countries that will receive primary consideration are Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, and Romania.

II. Textbooks:

There are two required books, which are available for purchase at the university text book store:

- Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: Collapse and Rebirth in Eastern Europe*, 2nd edition (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 2012).

- Witold Szablowski, *Dancing Bears: True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life Under Tyranny*(Penguin Books, 2018).

The rest of the readings will be available on Canvas under the "Files" tab.

I expect you to have completed the relevant assigned readings prior to class and to be ready to discuss them. As you will notice below, the readings are grouped by week. In each class period, I will keep you posted on which readings I will expect you to have completed for the next period. The reading schedule below is subject to change depending on the pace of progress and unforeseen scheduling changes. Please refer to the online syllabus for the latest version.

III. Assignments and Grading

Grades will be based on the following elements:

- **Attendance (3% of grade):** Class attendance is essential to success in this course. Repeated absences will unquestionably affect your performance on exams since they will be based on class lectures and section discussions in addition to readings.
- **Participation in class discussion and activities/assignments (17% of grade):** Student participation is an important component of this course. I assume full and active engagement with the readings, lectures, and discussions in the class. There will be frequent in-class assignments: essay prompts, debates, group work, and quizzes. Many of these will be turned in via Canvas and counted toward the participation grade. In the interests of fairness and given the size of the course, there will be no extra credit assignments. Oral participation will be assessed based on the instructor's assessment of how engaged each student was in class discussion and activities over the course of the semester. In terms of grading participation on individual assignments, there will be three possible categories: highly engaged (100%), moderately engaged (75%), insufficiently engaged (50%), and unengaged/incomplete assignment (0%).
 - NOTE: Because many in-class activities and assignments will require using Canvas, students will need to bring a laptop or other device capable of logging in to Canvas.
- **Three Response papers (30% of grade (10% per paper)):** 1 page single-spaced each. There will be three assigned topics (see below). Papers will be submitted via Canvas on the assigned due date (see below). Points will be deducted for late submission. A grading rubric will be made available before the first paper is due.
- **Exam #1 (25%):** March 3, in class.
- **Exam #2 (25%):** May 2, 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM.

IV. Policy on Make-Up Assignments

With regard to assignments, in-class exercises and tests, however, it will only be possible to make them up if the absence is excused. The terms for make-up assignments, including late penalties, are at the instructor's discretion. In the case of exams, a make-up is possible only with notification to the instructor prior to the exam and official medical documentation as to why the student was physically unable to take the exam. Make-ups for exam absences falling outside of these criteria will be scheduled at the instructor's discretion. They may take different form (essays) and may be assessed a late penalty.

According to the Office of the University Registrar, “acceptable reasons for absence from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, and professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) must be excused.”

V. Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center \(Links to an external site.\)](#). It is the student’s responsibility to contact the DRC at the beginning of the semester and to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

VI. Grading Scale

Name:	Range:
A	100% to 94%
A-	< 94% to 90%
B+	< 90% to 87%
B	< 87% to 84%
B-	< 84% to 80%
C+	< 80% to 77%
C	< 77% to 74%
C-	< 74% to 70%
D+	< 70% to 67%
D	< 67% to 64%

Name: Range:

D- < 64% to 61%

E < 61% to 0%

VII. Schedule of Class Meetings & Readings

Part I: Historical Background

Week 1 (Jan 9-13): Starting Points

- Situating the Region; the Interwar Period
- Democratic Breakdown
- WWII and the Imposition of Communism

Readings:

• *Developments in Central and East European Politics 3*: Ch. 1 J. Blatt, "Defining Central and Eastern Europe": 1-19. (Canvas)

• Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, pp. 1-14.

• Jan Gross, "Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies 3*(1989): 198-214. (Canvas)

Part II: Behind the Iron Curtain

Week 2 (Jan 18-20): Behind the Iron Curtain (I)

- Jan 16: Holiday, no class
- WWII continued
- Communist Takeover

Readings:

- Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity*, 2nd edition (Oxford UP: 1993), "Ch. 3: The Communists Come to Power," pp. 75-123 (Canvas).

Related videos for the curious:

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzcZBFImLoA&list=PL3H6z037pboGWTxs3xGP7HRGrQ5dOQdGc>

Week 3 (Jan 23-27): Behind the Iron Curtain (II)

- Communism in Theory and in Practice
- The Leninist State and the Command Economy
- Stalinism

Readings:

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," pp. 465-476. (Canvas)
- Andrew Janos, "What Was Communism: A Retrospective in Comparative Analysis," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29(1). (Canvas)
 - Read pp. 1-10 for this week.
- Paul Gregory, "Stalinist Command Economy", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*(January 1990): 18-25. (Canvas)

Related videos for the curious:

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "Comrades," esp. 5:15min.-8:00min. & 10:15min-13:15min.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22KIQ1QNhE&list=PL8hNHC9nbLlzb4miGp5pZPYCk9Zw0dGke>

Week 4 (Jan 30 – Feb 3): The Return of Civil Society?

- De-Stalinization
- Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring

Readings:

- Andrew Janos, "What Was Communism: A Retrospective in Comparative Analysis," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29(1). (Canvas)
 - - Read pp. 10-15 for this week.

- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*:
 - Czechoslovakia: 15-19, 57-59, 75-78
- Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless" in Brinton and Rinzler, eds., *Without Force or Lies* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1990): 43-73. (Canvas)
- **First Response Paper: Havel's "Power of the Powerless" (Due Feb 3 in class)**

Related videos for the curious:

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "Red Spring," esp. 25:42min.-27:10min. & 32:00min.-45:00min. (Discusses the Prague Spring)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQJAUfATBd0>

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "Freeze," esp. 10:10min.-15:03min. (Discusses the Helsinki Accords and dissident movements)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVVFAHiYfu0>

Week 5 (Feb 6–10): The Roots of Regime Breakdown

- Poland's Solidarity Movement
- The International Context: Gorbachev, Perestroika, and Glasnost

Readings:

- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*

- Poland: pp. 19-46.

- Gorbachev: 79-86, 157-158

- Andrew Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000): 329-360. (Canvas)
- Adam Michnik, "Letter from Gdańsk Prison (1985)" (Canvas)

Related videos for the curious:

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "Freeze," esp. 34:47min.-45:20min. (Discusses the Solidarity movement) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftYkDAqHJ_M

Part III: Democratization

Week 6 (Feb 13-17): The 1989 Revolutions (I)

- Varieties of Democratization: An Overview of the 1989 Revolutions
- Negotiated Transition: Poland & Hungary
- **Readings:**
- Andrew Janos, "What Was Communism: A Retrospective in Comparative Analysis," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29(1). (Canvas)

- Read pp. 16-20 for this week.

- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*
 - Poland: 123-150
 - Hungary: 95-117, 158-162

Related videos for the curious:

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "The Wall Comes Down,"
- HU's Transition: 3:35min.-9:17min.
- PL's Round Table: 10:00min.-12:00min.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrMgpWWdqkQ>

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "After Stalin," esp. 28:12min.-46:00min. (Discusses HU's 1956 revolution) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7K-hcgPom7Q>

Week 7 (Feb 20-24): The 1989 Revolutions (II)

- Regime Collapse: East Germany & Czechoslovakia
- Palace Coup: Elite Reshuffling in Bulgaria and Romania

Readings:

- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*
 - East Germany: 69-75, 162-168
 - Czechoslovakia: 174-183
 - Bulgaria: 59-62, 168-174
 - Romania: 62-69, 183-193
- T.G. Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, Ch. 5 "Prague: Inside the Magic Lantern" (Vintage: 1993), pp. 78-94. (Canvas)

- V. Tismaneanu, "The Revival of Politics in Romania," In *The New Europe: Revolution in East-West Relations* ed. N.H. Wessel, Proceedings, vol. 38, no. 1 The Academy of Political Science: pp. 85-100. (Canvas)

Related videos for the curious:

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "The Wall Comes Down," GDR's Collapse: 16:58min.-45:00min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrMgpWWdqkQ>
- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. Episode: "Conclusions," Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution: 5:00min.-7:45min.
- Romania's "palace coup": 7:45min-12:15min.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xidgcMW-LpA>

Week 8 (Feb 27 - March 3): The 1989 Revolutions (III) /Midterm Week

- Wrap-up on 1989
- Review for Midterm (March 1)
- ***Exam #1 (March 3)***

Part IV: Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict

Week 9 (March 6-10): Democratization, Nationalism, and Ethnic War

- A Comparison of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia
- Yugoslavia: Roots of the Conflict
- The Course of the Conflict

Readings:

- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, pp. 203-235, 278-282, 317-336.
- Andrew Janos, "Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: Ethnic Conflict and the Dissolution of Multinational States," *Exploratory Essays No. 3, International and Area Studies, University of California at Berkeley (1997) [CANVAS]*

- On Yugoslavia, 1-45.
- On Violence, 46-56.

SPRING BREAK (March 13-17)

Week 10 (March 20-24): Ethnic Cleansing

- Ethnic cleansing
- Srebrenica
- The Kosovo Conflict
- Concluding thoughts on postcommunist nationalism / Q&A
- **Readings:**
 - Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, (Harper Perennial 2002), pp. 247-251 & 391-421. (Canvas)
 - Szablowski, *Dancing Bears*, pp. 179-206.

Part V: The Transition to Capitalism

Week 11 (March 27-31): Models of Economic Reform

- Gradualism vs. Shock-Therapy
- Case study of Poland's "Big Bang"
- Democracy and Economic Reform: Complementary or Conflicting?

Readings:

• Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down:*

- The Reform Leaders, 269-278, 282-287.
- The Reform Laggards, 306-317.

- Jeffrey Sachs, *Poland's Jump to the Market Economy*(MIT Press, 1993), pp. 35-78 (Canvas)
- Joel Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions" *World Politics*50(1998): 203-234. (Canvas)

Week 12 (April 3–7): The Results of Economic Reform / EU Accession (part 1)

- The EU Accession Process: Background
- Optimistic and Pessimistic Views of Accession (part 1)

- The lived experience of economic transition and European integration / Discussion of Szablowski
 - **Second Response Paper due on April 7. Topic Szablowski, Dancing Bears reading, pp. 3-99.**

Readings:

- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, pp. 287-298.
- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, pp. 343-349.
- Grzegorz Ekiert, Jan Kubik and Milada Anna Vachudova (2007) "Democracy in the Postcommunist World," *East European Politics and Societies* 21, 1 (Winter): 7-30. (Available on Canvas)

Part V: Return to Europe or the Nation? EU Accession and the New Populism

Week 13 (April 10-14): EU Accession and the Euroskepticism

- Optimistic and Pessimistic Views of Accession (part 2)
- Democratic Backsliding and Euroskepticism in Hungary and Poland
- Case study of accession politics: LGBT+ rights

Readings:

- Grzymala-Busse, A., & A. Innes. 2003. "Great expectations: The EU and domestic political competition in East Central Europe." *East European Politics and Societies* 17 (1): 64-73. (Canvas)
- R. Daniel Kelemen. (2017) "Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union," *Government and Opposition* 52(2): 211-238. (Canvas)
- Conor O'Dwyer, "[How Poland's attacks on LGBT rights strengthened the Polish LGBT movement](#)," *The Washington Post*, Monkey Cage. (August 26, 2019).

Week 14 (April 17-21): Whither Ukraine? Lessons from East Europe's Experience

- April 17: Historical background on Ukraine
- April 19: Background on the war in Ukraine
- April 21: **Third Response Paper Due, Whither Ukraine? / In-Class Debate**

Readings:

- TBD

Week 15 (April 24-26):

- April 24: Concluding reflections / Course evaluation day
- April 26: Exam review

Final Exam: 5/02/2023 @ 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM.

Appendices

Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Masks

Masks are welcome in the classroom. Regardless of vaccination status, mask usage is a responsible and vital way of preventing transmission of COVID-19. Faculty may also ask for mask usage in their offices during one-on-one meetings (with a provision for remote office hour meetings as an alternative).

Vaccination

If you have not been vaccinated, please consider starting the process immediately. Please keep in mind that being vaccinated for COVID-19 is the best way to protect yourself and others from the potentially life-threatening effects of the virus. Your action in this regard may help ensure the health and safety of yourself, your fellow CLAS students, and the faculty and staff with whom you interact.

Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [\(Links to an external site.\)](#) [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

Technical Support for E-Learning and Canvas

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk \(Links to an external site.\)](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Resources for Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website \(Links to an external site.\)](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website \(Links to an external site.\)](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.