

# The Politics of Eastern Europe

## (CPO 3614/EUS 3930)

**Professor Conor O'Dwyer**

**Email: PLEASE EMAIL ME WITHIN THE CANVAS SYSTEM!**

**Course Times:** MWF 1:55-2:45, Pugh 120

**Office Hours:** Fridays 3-4:30pm in Anderson 332 or by appointment

### 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 phenomenon 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 (de-)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.

### Textbooks:

There are two required books, which are available for purchase at the university text book store. The book by Stokes is also available in on-line form on the UF Library's webpage:

- 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.

### Assignments and Grading

Grades will be based on the following elements:

- **Attendance (5% 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 (5% of grade):** Student participation is an important component of this course. I expect full and active engagement with the readings, lectures, and discussions in the class. Oral participation in class discussion will be assessed based on the instructor's assessment of how engaged each student was over the course of the semester. In terms of grading participation, there will be three possible categories: highly engaged (100%), moderately engaged (85%), insufficiently engaged (70%), and unengaged/incomplete assignment (50%).
- **In-class activities/assignments (10% of grade):** There will be frequent in-class assignments: essay prompts based on the readings, group work, and quizzes. Students will turn these in via Canvas. Grading of these assignments is based on effort and engagement, and there will be three possible categories: highly engaged (100%), moderately engaged (85%), insufficiently engaged (70%), and incomplete assignment (0%). In the interests of fairness and given the size of the course, *there will be no extra credit assignments*. Because the grading is based on effort and engagement, the instructor may not provide comments other than feedback for improvement.
  - NOTE: Because these in-class assignments will require using Canvas, students will need to bring a laptop or other device capable of logging in to Canvas.
- **Two in-class response essays (30% of grade (15% per essay)):** For these essays, students will prepare beforehand by reading an assigned text. Then on the day of the assignment, students will bring a laptop to class, where they will have the full class period to write their essay via Canvas. The essay prompts will not be available until the day of the assignment, at the beginning of the class period.
  - **In-class response essay #1, covering Havel "Power of the Powerless," Sept 8**
  - **In-class response essay #2, covering Szablowski, *Dancing Bears*, Nov 7**
- **Two in-class tests:** These will be multiple-choice/short answer format and will cover the relevant material for each half of the semester.
  - **Test #1 (25%): March 1, in class.**
  - **Test #2 (25%): Nov 19, in class.**

### **Policy on Make-Up Assignments**

It will only be possible to make up tests and in-class response essays if the absence is excused, which means providing the instructor with documentation of one of the acceptable reasons for absence from class described below. The terms for make-up assignments, including late penalties, are at the instructor's discretion. 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 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.”

### **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.

### **Grading Scale**

Letter Grade	Range
A	100%to93%
A-	< 93%to90%
B+	< 90%to87%
B	< 87%to83%
B-	< 83%to80%
C+	< 80%to77%
C	< 77%to73%
C-	< 73%to70%
D+	< 70%to67%
D	< 67%to63%
D-	< 63%to60%
F	< 60%to0%

**Note:** A grade of C– is not a qualifying grade for major, minor, Gen Ed, or College Basic distribution credit. For further information on UF's Grading Policy, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Use of ChatGPT or other AI systems is not allowed. All written work in this course must be your own. 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.

### **Schedule of Class Meetings & Readings**

## **Part I: Historical Background**

### **Week 1 (Aug 22): Introduction**

- Course Expectations and Information
- Where is "Eastern Europe"?

#### ***Readings:***

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

### **Week 2 (Aug 25-29): Situating the Region**

- Situating the Region, cont...
- The Interwar Period
- 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)
- 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)

#### ***Related videos for the curious:***

- Documentary "The Cold War," CNN. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzcZBFImLoA&list=PL3H6z037pboGWTxs3xGP7HRGrQ5dOOdGc>

## **Part II: Behind the Iron Curtain**

### **Week 3 (Sept 3-5): What was Stalinism?**

- Sept. 1: Holiday, no class
- Communism in Theory and in Practice
- 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=22KIQ1QNnhE&list=PL8hNHC9nbLlzb4miGp5pZPYCk9Zw0dGke>

### **Week 4 (Sept 8 – 12): De-Stalinization and Ideological Decay**

- De-Stalinization
- The 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)
- **Sept 8: In-class response essay #1 on Václav Havel "Power of the Powerless"**

***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 (Sept 15–19): 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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftYkDAqHJ_M)

**Part III: Democratization**

**Week 6 (Sept 22-26): 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 (Sept 29 – October 3): 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 (Oct 6 - 10): The 1989 Revolutions (III) /Midterm Week**

- Wrap-up on 1989
- Review for Midterm (Oct 6)
- ***Test #1 (Oct 10)***

## **Part IV: Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict**

### **Week 9 (Oct 13 - 15): 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.

### **Week 10 (Oct 20-24): Ethnic Cleansing**

- Ethnic cleansing
- Srebrenica
- The Kosovo Conflict
- **Readings:**
  - Andrew Janos, "Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: Ethnic Conflict and the Dissolution of Multinational States," (1997) [CANVAS]
    - On violence, pp. 46-56.
  - 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 (Oct 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* (1998): 203-234. (Canvas)

#### **Week 12 (Nov 3 – 7): The Results of Economic Reform**

- The lived experience of economic transition
- Nov 7: **In-class response essay #2 on Szablowski, *Dancing Bears*, pp. 3-99**

#### ***Readings:***

- Branko Milanovic, "For Whom the Wall Fell" (<https://www.theglobalist.com/for-whom-the-wall-fell-a-balance-sheet-of-the-transition-to-capitalism/Links to an external site.>)
- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, pp. 287-298.
- Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, pp. 343-349.

### **Part V: Return to Europe or the Nation? EU Accession**

#### **Week 13 (Nov 10 - 14): EU Accession and Euroskepticism**

- The EU Accession Process: Background
- Optimistic and Pessimistic Views of Accession
- Euroskepticism, Populism, and Democratic Backsliding

#### ***Readings:***

- David R. Cameron, "The Challenges of Accession," *EEPS*, 17 (2003): 24-41. (Canvas)

- 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)
- Bermeo, Nancy. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of democracy* 27.1 (2016): 5–19. (Canvas)
- Lenka Bušítková and Petra Guasti. "The state as a firm: Understanding the autocratic roots of technocratic populism." *East European Politics and Societies* 33.2 (2019): 302-330.

#### **Week 14 (Nov 17 - 21): Test & Group Activity Prep**

- Nov 17: Catch-up and review for Test #2
- Nov 19: Test #2
- Nov 21: Preparation for final in-class activity

#### ***Readings:***

- TBD

#### **Week 15 (Dec 1 - 3): Group Activity**

- Dec 1: Final in-class activity
- Dec 3: Course evaluation day

#### **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 or in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals.

\*For a full description of UF's academic policies and resources, see: [https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/Links to an external site.](https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site)