

Goodbye to 1989 and All That

Michael Bernhard and Daniel O'Neill

The Presidential Address

It is this journal's privilege to publish the APSA Presidential Address every year, and it is our honor to showcase the contributions to the profession of past president Janet Box-Steffensmeier, the Vernal Riffe Professor of Political Science and Professor of Sociology at the Ohio State University. She specializes in the fields of American politics and political methodology. Box-Steffensmeier is a pioneer—one of the first women to have a major impact in the traditionally male-dominated field of quantitative methodology. She has also served as the Dean for Social and Behavioral Science, the Dean for Graduate Affairs of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Interim Executive Dean and Vice Provost, all at Ohio State. Her contributions to teaching, mentorship, and research have been recognized widely by Ohio State; the Political Methodology and the Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior Sections of APSA; the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research; and the Women's Caucus of the Midwest Political Science Association. Before serving as APSA president, she was president of the Midwest Political Science Association and the Political Methodology Section of APSA. In 2017 she was elected as a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

For those who use event history models and think seriously about how to model time in quantitative research, Box-Steffensmeier's works written with a series of esteemed coauthors are classics of the field that are taught widely in methods courses in many departments around the country (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Joyce 2007; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2014; Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997; 2004; Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001; Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2002). In American politics she has made major contributions on such issues as the gender gap, partisanship, legislative success, incumbency and position-taking in Congress, and amicus curiae briefs (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair 2003; Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, and Zorn 1997; Box-Steffensmeier and Christensen 2014; Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004). She was also one of the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, a volume notable for its encyclopedic and inclusive

approach to modern political science methods (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier 2008).

Her presidential address, titled *Engaged Pluralism: The Importance of Commitment*, presents an ambitious framework for how political science can contribute to solving the current crisis of American democracy and the acute polarization that has so divided us for the last several years. Box-Steffensmeier sees us living in a golden age of political methodology. Here she not only highlights our greater ability to collect data and process it with ever-growing computer power and the benefits of artificial intelligence and machine learning, but also the explosion in the publication of wide-ranging work that explores the best practices for qualitative methodologies that bring alternative epistemologies to the table. This golden age in her estimation has radically enhanced our ability to offer solutions to the social, political, and environmental problems that challenge our existence and threaten the quality of human life globally.

This progress across traditions of inquiry can be magnified, she claims, by the creation of integrated teams that bring together practitioners of multiple methodologies to research the great questions of our day. This is one way in which Box-Steffensmeier argues that the profession must be engaged. The active collaboration of such teams of researchers who bring different methodological perspectives to bear on the questions they seek to answer is the second fundamental element of what she means by "engaged pluralism." However, collaboration may go even further. Building on work that has explored how our discipline has been constrained by blinders of race, gender, religion, and class, she also advocates assembling research teams that combine collaborators of differing positionalities who can bring a range of perspectives to bear on research that frames practical solutions to current problems. This is a third dimension of engaged pluralism.

Due to space constraints, elements of her proposal are not fully fleshed out. First, how to organize such collaboration between methodologically and socially diverse groups requires a great deal of care. Second, solutions derived by experts, no matter how scientifically sound and convincing, still must be translated into the political realm, where the self-interest of actors is often the greatest

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barrier to putting solutions into practice. Box-Steffensmeier is aware of these problems and does not shy away from them. Her address is no “one-off,” delivered to the annual meeting and then shelved. She and several collaborators will address all these issues in greater detail in a projected *Oxford Handbook* volume on engaged pluralism, which promises to build on her earlier landmark work, *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. This is an ambitious agenda, and we are fortunate to publish one of the first outlines of this next and, we hope, even more consequent phase in her research.

Regression to the Mean in Eastern Europe?

History is full of irony. The past plays tricks on the present. Explanation seemingly turns into prediction. Consider the following observations:

These rulers were imbued with a mentality entirely unsuited to the creation of systems consistent with the more or less liberal constitutions with which their new countries presented them.

But it is a fact that when the East European countries came to political consciousness they had very little choice as to the style of organization their new nations would adopt—it would be the modern state, with its legislature, courts, centralized bureaucracy, and intrusive mentality.

The state...whereas it operated using the same forms as its models in the West, the actual content of political activity was more consistent with traditional status societies than with more legalistic societies from which the state forms were copied. (Stokes 1989: 244–45)

These are excerpts from the conclusion of an essay written by Gale Stokes, the late eminent American historian of Eastern Europe, thinking about ways in which Barrington Moore’s social science helped us understand patterns of development in the “other Europe.” These words, written before the dramatic events of 1989, sought to explain the failures of Eastern European states to deliver stability, prosperity, and democracy after recovering their sovereignty in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When one reads them with the benefit of hindsight, one confronts another irony of history—sometimes the second time around is an even bigger tragedy than the first.¹

So, what went wrong in Eastern Europe? What happened to the unchecked optimism of 1989–91, when it seemed that the region might well replace Communist Party state dictatorship with Western-style liberal democracy and welfare-state capitalism? Was this just a repetition of age-old patterns that doomed democracy in that “other Europe” yet again? Was this analogous to the problem of age-old hatreds that were conveniently used to explain the disintegration of Yugoslavia while ignoring the contemporary specifics (Kaplan 1993)?

If one looks at the post-communist states today, the region is more authoritarian than democratic. If we start with the Soviet successor states, four of the five Central

Asian successor states—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—are out-and-out institutionalized authoritarian regimes, as is Azerbaijan in the Caucasus. Both Russia and Belarus have long ceased to be competitive authoritarian regimes and are now personalist dictatorships under strongmen.² A trio of post-Soviet states—Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova—have not achieved regime stability; instead, they have moved back and forth between periods of democracy and competitive authoritarianism (Hale 2005; Way 2005). The situation there is quite similar to that of one state in Central Asia—Kyrgyzstan. Even if its regime has not quite met the criteria for electoral democracy, the dynamics of Kyrgyzstan’s politics are decidedly more competitive than in its neighbors, and yet it too oscillates close to democracy and then veers away from it (Engvall 2015). Of the successor states of the Soviet Union, only four very small states on the periphery of the old imperium—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Georgia—have achieved any degree of democratic stability.

The situation in East-Central and South-East Europe is more in flux after a period in which many had assumed that democracy had consolidated. The states in these regions all achieved democracy either directly following the collapse of Communist Party rule or after a delay, via the Color Revolutions of the 1990s (Beissinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2011). There has been one conspicuous breakdown of democracy in the region, in Hungary, where Viktor Orbán has gutted all forms of accountability and stacked the electoral system in favor of his ruling Fidesz Party. In several other states, populist leaders have inaugurated periods of democratic backsliding. This has been acute in Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, all of which were early democratizers and had been seen as exemplars of post-communist success.

The special section in this journal issue contains two articles that discuss these developments in great detail (Sitter and Bakke; Pirro and Stanley). These cases have seen the rise of populist leaders such as Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, Janez Janša in Slovenia, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic. Babiš plays the demagogue less than the others and pursues what some observers have called technocratic populism, a form that tries to frame politics as a technical problem and thus disarm the opposition (Buščíková and Guasti 2019; Guasti 2020). Another notable populist in the region is Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia. He has managed to effectively erode democratic accountability over time despite a remarkable effort by Serbian civil society, in which a movement called “One of Five Million” (#1od5miliona) mounted sequential weekly protests from November 30, 2018 to March 16, 2020, until the COVID pandemic led to its suspension.

Given what is going on globally, it should come as no surprise that populism also poses a threat to young

democracies in Eastern Europe. After all, the United States has just experienced its first attempted *auto-golpe* by a sitting president. His captured party shows no signs of regret and is doubling down on its attempts to make the acquisition of power independent of actual vote tallies. The combination of austerity following the Great Recession, pandemic lockdown and economic slowdown, peak emigration to developed countries with no signs of deceleration, the palpable and accelerating effects of global warming, and the continued exacerbation of inequality within countries has left voters angry, disoriented, and vulnerable to the appeals of demagogues posing scapegoats and offering simplistic solutions.

It is clear that the benefits of marketization have been overstated in Eastern Europe, as in many parts of the world. Where market reforms were obstructed or introduced half-heartedly, the economic outcomes were generally worse, resulting in highly unequal and corrupt patrimonial states with large, impoverished populations. Still, the West believed its own utopian myths about just what unfettered markets can do, and there were many in Eastern Europe who embraced this dream. The transformation of the world economy over the last 30 years—with globalized supply chains, advances in microelectronics and computers, deregulation, a race to the bottom in tax rates, and cutbacks to the welfare state—has created zones of prosperity and devastation within nations. Where things have gone badly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it is as if whole countries have never recovered from the Great Depression; where they have done better, the benefits have been unequally shared (Ghodsee and Orenstein, 2021). Further, there is a general feeling that the pattern of distribution has been corrupt, and this has undermined the establishment of institutionalized parties that are seen as protecting citizens from the negative externalities of the market (Houghton and Deegan-Krause 2021).

The most disconcerting manifestation of the poor performance of democracies in Eastern Europe has been that the countries who were the early movers, the innovators in regime change, and those that made the greatest progress in terms of establishing democracy, marketizing their economies, and integrating into the institutions of the “West” are the ones that have been highly vulnerable to the current wave of populism. How was this possible? After all Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic all had functioning democratic governments for 15 to 20 years before experiencing episodes of backsliding or breakdown and had achieved OECD levels of GDP/capita. Thirty years of econometric research on democratic survival told us that these countries should not have been candidates for failure (Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom 2003; Boix 2003; Przeworski et al. 2000). So far only Hungary has been a conspicuous case of breakdown, but Poland, at times, seems to be hanging by a thread.

So, what did we get wrong here as political scientists? Our working hypothesis is that this is a case of timing linked to the modalities of capitalism. We can contrast the situation today with the redemocratization of Europe after fascism. As Sheri Berman (2007) reminds us, the reintroduction of democracy in Western Europe was accompanied by the construction of the postwar period’s expansive welfare states. The polarizing divisions caused by poverty and widespread inequality that plagued many of the continent’s interwar experiments with democracy were mediated. Democratic development was enhanced by an economy that was highly embedded, in Karl Polanyi’s terms (2001). Furthermore, both reaction and fascism were discredited by the destruction and defeat they unleashed in World Wars I and II.

When communism collapsed, Eastern Europe had to negotiate a multidimensional process of change that involved not only democratization but also the transformation of a bureaucratic-command economy to a highly unembedded form of capitalism where the unimpeded logic of the market was prioritized over measures to protect those who suffered from its negative externalities. Although the period from 1989 to 2007 was one of expansive growth globally, it was accompanied by record inequality, the wholesale failure of outdated industries, and the devastation of places dependent on them. Whereas in the West, welfare state protections, albeit reduced by the politics of austerity, remained in place, to the East such protections were more modest and were sometimes dismantled as part of the *ancien régime*. Things went swimmingly until the Great Recession of 2007–9, when growth slowed or collapsed in the region. With the first exogenous external shock, the foundation of the liberal democratic and capitalist system that replaced communism was undermined. The weakness here was in the attempt to re-create the West in the East without the shock absorbers that protected democracy and capitalism from economic contraction and the opportunities it hands to demagogues. As it stands now, the region is more authoritarian than democratic, though there are still important differences between the former USSR and East-Central and South-Eastern Europe. The fate of democracy in those latter two regions hangs in the balance, with Hungary already in need of redemocratization. The most hopeful sign has been the elections this past fall in the Czech Republic, where two anti-Babiš coalitions make it seem as though the incumbent technopopulist prime minister will not be able to form a government.

The Special Section Contributions

The first contribution to the special section, by Nick Sitter and Elisabeth Bakke, “The EU’s *Enfants Terribles*: Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe since 2010,” assesses the degree of democratic backsliding in the Visegrad 4. Because of the paradigmatic nature of the process in

Poland and Hungary, they argue that the concept of democratic backsliding has been applied broadly to the post-communist countries, resulting in a classic case of concept stretching. They then assess the extent of democratic backsliding in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and compare it to Hungary and Poland. The situation in the former two is less dire, and they conclude that the situation in the region is not as desperate as claimed by some observers.

Graeme Robertson and Samuel A. Greene explore the development of modern authoritarianism and its stability in “Affect and Autocracy: Emotions and Attitudes in Russia after Crimea.” Here they depart from the classic literature on authoritarianism and its focus on coercive and material incentives and the manipulation of institutions. Instead, they explore the ability of some rulers, Vladimir Putin in particular, to generate and maintain genuine popularity and legitimacy. In another departure from the classic literature, they incorporate the role of emotional attachments. They argue that Putin received an emotional boost after the successful annexation of the Crimea, which led many to reassess both their evaluation of the accomplishments of the regime beyond foreign policy and their understanding of the past.

Jan Matti Dollbaum looks at the lasting impacts that protest movements can have through the creation of activist networks at the local level. His empirical material in “When Does Diffusing Protest Lead to Local Organization Building? Evidence from a Comparative Subnational Study of Russia’s ‘For Fair Elections’ Movement” is based on the widespread protests of 2011–12. Drawing on original fieldwork in four regions in Russia and a broad array of print and virtual sources, he finds that protests leave behind social movement organizations in those places where local activists succeed in channeling national events into their struggles over local issues. He shows how national movements can leave behind networks of activists and a repertoire of actions that can have a lasting effect on the quality and extent of civil society on a local level.

In “Taking Authoritarian Anti-Corruption Reform Seriously,” Christopher Carothers’s work reminds us that there was another critical uprising in 1989 that failed: Tiananmen Square. It choked off democratic aspirations in China for three decades, and now there is a form of rule that is post-communist in political economy terms but is still run by communist parties in China and Vietnam. The performance of these regimes has been impressive, producing both economic development and stability. In this piece Carothers challenges the widely held assumption that authoritarian regimes are not as effective as democracies in stemming corruption because it is an intrinsic part of the material basis of authoritarian coalition-building. He shows that authoritarian regimes are sometimes quite effective in controlling corruption, but that they do so using different means than in democracies, such as

centralized power, top-down control and penetration, and widespread propaganda. He illustrates many of these mechanisms in an account of the Chinese president Xi Jinping’s anticorruption campaign. His article shows that states with strong institutions, no matter their regime type, have the capacity to control corruption.

In “Forging, Bending, and Breaking: Enacting the ‘Illiberal Playbook’ in Hungary and Poland,” Andrea Pirro and Ben Stanley examine the nature, scope, and consequences of the processes by which illiberal elites have dismantled liberal democracy using a common set of political maneuvers. They focus on Poland and Hungary, the two most conspicuous cases of democratic breakdown and backsliding in East-Central Europe. The authors illustrate how populism and nativism were used in practice to “forge,” “bend,” or “break” elements of the liberal order and assess the implications for executive power, civil liberties, and the rule of law.

The special section also includes two reflections. In “Will the Real Conspiracy Please Stand Up: Sources of Post-Communist Democratic Failure,” Maria Popova and Nikolay Marinov focus on the impact of conspiracy theories on democratic deterioration in the region. They argue that there is real collusion by elites to protect their power and material benefits, but that it is difficult to identify because of the existence of widespread conspiracy theories, which have only expanded in the age of COVID and made it harder to discern the truth. This plays into the hands of incumbents, because misinformation allows them to further confuse voters and, in the case of COVID conspiracies, divide their opposition even more, enabling them to present themselves as competent rulers who follow European norms by resisting absurd stories about the virus and how to control it.

Last but not least, Jeffrey Kopstein and Stephen E. Hanson, discuss a new form of convergence between East and West in “Understanding the Global Patrimonial Wave.” They argue that the long-standing dichotomy between democratic and authoritarian regimes is no longer adequate to encapsulate the burning issues of our day. In both democracies and autocracies, they identify the troubling rise of strongmen leaders (the gender is purposive) who work to undermine rational-legal rule as a constraint on their power and replace it with a personalized form of patrimonialism where loyalty to the leader is paramount. They note that the origins of this trend lie in the failure to establish bona fide democracy in several regions of the world, including Eastern Europe, and that its practices have since inspired aspiring autocrats in the West.

The Other Programming

We also have a number of other excellent articles in this issue. The theme of the piece by Peter Trubowitz and Brian Burgoon, “The Retreat of the West,” is somewhat related to the special section. It examines the incremental

withdrawal of the West from liberal internationalism, a phenomenon that they argue is older than recent manifestations of this trend, like Donald Trump's "America First" policies or Brexit. They find that this retreat has been going on since the end of the Cold War and occurred because the West's capacities are not adequate to meet its internationalist aspirations. This drop-off in capacity is linked to an increased Western reliance on globalization as the main mechanism to expand the international liberal order. This reliance has had the effect of weakening the establishment parties that have pursued this policy in favor of dissenting parties of the Left and Right that have criticized and opposed these efforts.

In "What is a Consultative Referendum? The Democratic Legitimacy of Popular Consultations," Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Giulia Oskian examine the democratic legitimacy of popular referendums by asking whether they should be understood as bypassing or complementing representative institutions. To do so, they focus on the distinction between legislative and consultative referendums. They focus on the latter as one possible way of reconciling the referendum procedure with representative democracy. The authors argue that consultative referendums should be understood as specifying the political mandate of elected representatives and apply the results of this conceptual work to the case of the Greek bailout and Brexit referendums to clarify the normative implications and significance of their theory.

Abigail Taylor's and Alexander Lefebvre's article, "Three Reasons for Hospitality: Care for Others, Care for the World, and Care of the Self," asks why private citizens in liberal democracies offer hospitality to undocumented migrants. Relying on qualitative interviews with French citizens, the authors propose three reasons for this behavior. The first is the widely recognized notion that hospitality is offered out of a care and concern for vulnerable and precarious migrants. However, Taylor and Lefebvre discern two additional reasons that are not acknowledged in studies on hospitality: the desire by citizens to uphold the basic principles and ideals of their own society (what they call "care for the world") and the desire on the part of citizens themselves to become different and better kind of people by practicing hospitality (what they call "care of the self"). The article thus provides a complex and illuminating account of the multifaceted motivations that lead citizens to offer hospitality, even in situations where it is outlawed by their own governments.

Jamila Michener, Mallory SoRelle, and Chloe Thurston propose a novel approach to studying the welfare state by centering it around the populations it serves. In "From the Margins to the Center: A Bottom-Up Approach to Welfare State Scholarship," they argue that a top-down examination, rather than looking at those at the proverbial "bottom" of social hierarchies, has led us to overlook facets of the welfare state that require our attention so we can

address the problems associated with life in material poverty. They suggest that a bottom-up approach will lead to new research questions and knowledge that will allow us to better address the problem of enduring poverty in one of the globe's richest states.

In "The Impact of Covid-19 on Trump's Electoral Demise: The Role of Economic and Democratic Accountability," Anja Neundorf and Sergi Pardos Prado ask whether the pandemic had a significant effect on Trump's electoral loss. Based on a survey experiment, they find that the pandemic-related economic slump depressed Trump's support generally, but particularly among lower-income respondents. Additionally, the failed public health response to COVID-19 hurt his support among populations 55 to 70 years old. Despite concerns over the attempts of Trump and other populist leaders to undermine democratic accountability mechanisms, they find that vertical accountability worked and that Trump's loss is well explained by our existing theories of economic voting and competent performance.

Once again we return to the pathologies of the carceral state with Anna Gunderson's "Why Do States Privatize their Prisons? The Unintended Consequences of Inmate Litigation." The dominant narrative on the widespread turning over of prison administration to for-profit corporations is that it helps reduce the size of the state and balance the budget. Gunderson also notes that privatization has been a way for government to avoid litigation brought by prisoners and its associated administrative and fiscal burdens. Using an original dataset, she finds that prison privatization is better predicted by legal pressure on the corrections system, rather than small-state conservative control of state governments.

Matthew R. Cleary and Aykut Öztürk also discuss the current global crisis of democracy in "When Does Backsliding Lead to Breakdown? Uncertainty and Opposition Strategies in Democracies at Risk." They focus on incumbent politicians who take power by democratic means and try, unsuccessfully, to establish autocratic rule. Examining a mix of successful and unsuccessful cases of executive aggrandizement when the ex-ante commitments of actors to the democratic system are in flux, the authors see the behavior of opposition actors as critical. They conclude that extrasystemic efforts to remove the incumbent tend to prolong the crisis of democracy and promote breakdown, and that moderate resistance to executive aggrandizement is more conducive to the long-term survival of democracy.

Finally, the scholarly research team of Milan Vaishnav, Adam Auerbach, Jennifer Bussell, Simon Chauchard, Francesca Jensenius, Gareth Nellis, Mark Schneider, Neelanjan Sircar, Pavithra Suryanarayan, Tariq Thachil, Rahul Verma, and Adam Ziegfeld think through the implications of electoral behavior in the world's largest democracy in "Rethinking the Study of Electoral Politics

in the Developing World: Reflections on the Indian Case.” The authors examine a set of assumptions about electoral politics in the developing world: “the centrality of contingency in distributive politics, the role of ethnicity in shaping political behavior, and the organizational weakness of political parties.” They examine these assumptions in the face of the development of electoral politics over time and the diversity that has been uncovered in the new and expanding literature on subnational politics in India. Their understanding of how India is beginning to diverge from this prevailing wisdom leads them to question these long-held beliefs about electoral politics in the developing world more generally.

One Final Note

This issue marks our twentieth year of publication. Many thanks to the American Political Science Association, Cambridge University Press, and the editorial teams that preceded us (Jennifer’s, Jim’s, and Jeff’s). We are grateful for such a solid intellectual foundation.

Notes

- 1 “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce” (Marx 1978: 594).
- 2 Every time we read a journalist who describes Belarus as the “last dictatorship” in Europe, we are impressed by their ability to grasp onto a cliché rather than do the background work necessary for good journalism.

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