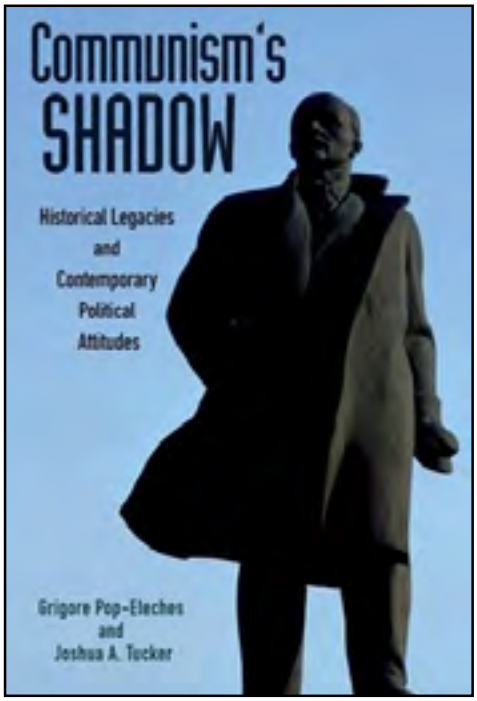
BOOK REVIEW



Communism's Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes

By Grigore Pop-Eleches and Joshua A. Tucker

Princeton University Press, 2017. 344 pp., Paper. £25.00 (Paperback)
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Communism's Shadow directly focuses on a question that probably concerns anyone who has studied, thought and taught about the formerly Communist societies of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, including the current author: Whether and how does the experience of Communism shape present-day post-communist societies? This is an enormous question, and as the authors indicate from the outset, they are only examining one dimension of "Communism's shadow," namely, political attitudes of citizens toward democracy, markets, social welfare, and gender equality through cross-national survey data. Such a limitation was necessary since in their words, "[e]ven to explore four sets of attitudes thoroughly has required us to write a fairly long book" (p.20). As such, this book would be of interest to scholars of political behaviour in particular. In contrast, if you are interested in other communist legacies such as continuities in elite composition, ethnic and religious policies, or the physical environment (city planning, etc.), you might have to search for answers elsewhere. Nonetheless, many attitudinal differences reported and analysed in this book are indirect indicators of the post-communist patterns we are likely to observe in some of these related fields as well.

The comparative findings of the book are straightforward. Compared to the rest of the world, post-communist citizens are less supportive of democracy, markets, and gender equality, while they are more supportive of social welfare provisions, as summarised in Figure 1 on page 2 and explained in meticulous detail throughout the book. Apart from the counterintuitive findings on gender equality, the other results are not surprising but rather, as would be expected: Communism vociferously opposed Western-style multiparty democracy and market economy, while supporting social welfare provisions, although the latter was less central to its ideology and practice as the authors emphasise. Is living through communism or living in post-communist countries more responsible for producing these lasting effects? The authors are unequivocal in concluding that living through communism has been a more decisive factor than living in a post-communist country for the systematic attitudinal patterns they analyse (p.26 and 286).

"Soviet communism was arguably history's greatest experiment in trying to reorganize the fundamental tenets of political, economic, and social life in a radical fashion." (p.282) Even when living under communist regimes, however, the exposure to communism varied significantly based on what the authors describe as the intensity of and resistance to exposure variables. In their brilliant use of the sunburn analogy, they assert that it matters whether you are exposed to the sun (i.e., communism) in clear or cloudy weather, at noon or late afternoon, and whether you are wearing sunscreen or not. Thus, a single year of exposure to communism does not mean the same intensity of exposure in Enver Hoxha's Albania or Stalin's Soviet Union or in Hungary under "goulash socialism." (Unfortunately, Albania is missing from Table 2.1 on "Communist Experience by Year and Country" on page 51, even though the discussions on that page and in the following pages refer to Albania.) Similarly, observant Catholics and Muslims could more successfully resist (e.g., sunscreen) anti-democratic and anti-market attitudinal effects of communism, respectively, than Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and atheists. "In the case of Muslims who regularly attend religious services, the resistance effect is so strong that it completely wipes out any socialization effect of an additional year of exposure to communism on anti-market attitudes." (p.158) In many dimensions, exposure to communism during adulthood rather than childhood was more decisive, contrary to findings in other parts of the world, and being in an urban centre rather than in a rural area exposed one more to the communist ideology.

There are of course many other aspects of communist legacies that are not discussed in this book, and which are arguably even more important than the mostly generational attitudinal differences that Pop-Eleches and Tucker analyse. For example, in many post-communist countries, former Communist party elites known as the *nomenklatura* continued to dominate politics and economics as has been documented by Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White among others (1). Similarly, in terms of the physical environment, as Stephen Kotkin observed, "studying the urban design and construction of tiny Albania can allow one to generalize about more than one-sixth of the earth's surface" because the "Soviet phenomenon created a deeply unified material culture." (2) Having a political and economic elite that is mostly of nomenklatura background and living in a physical environment that still deeply bears the imprint of communism, are likely to have very significant effects on individuals and societies in the post-communist world.

Finally, and of particular interest to the current author, are

the ethnic policies associated with Soviet communism and their long-lasting effects to the present-day, which are not at all examined by Pop-Eleches and Tucker. The end of "legal discrimination against ethnic minorities" is mentioned in passing (p.41), but Soviet socialism was far more than that. In the memorable formulation of Terry Martin, the Soviet Union was the first "affirmative action empire," which recognised dozens of official languages, allowed ethnic territorial autonomies at multiple levels (SSRs, ASSRs, etc.), recorded the ethnic identity of all of its citizens ostensibly for purposes of positive discrimination, and officially institutionalised ethnic diversity to a greater extent than any modern state has ever done until then, and arguably ever since. (3) This had vast consequences that deeply influence even present-day political outcomes. In a study of 26 European countries over three legislative cycles, Yury Katliarou and I recently demonstrated that post-communist European polities have significantly better descriptive representation of their Muslim minorities in national parliaments than non-communist European countries and that this outcome is mostly due to the prior institutionalisation of ethnocultural diversity in post-communist polities. (4) This is not to say that communism or its residual effects support the religious identity of Muslims; on the contrary, as a militant atheist regime, communism aspired to furnish every ethnic group with a new culture that is only "national in form, socialist in content."

Western European colonialism and communism are probably the two processes that had the deepest impact in shaping modern societies, as most countries around the world are either post-colonial, post-communist or both. This book demonstrates the many ways in which the experience of Soviet communism still shapes public opinion in dozens of post-communist societies across Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Despite being saturated with tedious discussions of statistical results that might not appeal to every reader, *Communism's Shadow* has stylistic elements that make it a more palatable reading. For example, starting with Chapter 2, all the chapters begin with a topical Soviet joke that allows the reader a humorous glimpse of "actually existing Socialism." As the authors emphasise at the outset, the question of whether communism successfully created the "Socialist Man" (p.30) is an important question, to which a partial answer is provided in this precious book.

1- Olga Kryshtanovksaya and Stephen White, "From Soviet *Nomenklatura* to Russian Elite," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 48, no. 5 (1996): 711-733.

2- Stephen Kotkin, "Mongol Commonwealth? Exchange and Governance across the Post-Mongol Space," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 8, no.3 (2007), p.520.

3- Terry D. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, 1923-1939 (Cornell University Press, 2001)

4- Şener Aktürk and Yury Katliarou, "Institutionalization of Ethnocultural Diversity and the Representation of European Muslims," *Perspectives on Politics* (2020): 1-18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720001334