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# The anatomy of post-communist regimes: a conceptual framework

by Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2020, xxv + 808 pp., index, bibliography, £105.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-963-386-371-8

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confidence in the generalizability of the results – although the patterns revealed by the network analysis are in some cases not unambiguous and thus leave some room for interpretation by the researcher.

A few question marks remain after reading the book, and this has mostly to do with the unsettled relationship between social constructs and "brute facts". The latter are first dismissed by the author when defining main concepts such as "political crisis" or "youth" (p. 8), but in the end many arguments are explicitly or implicitly based on supposedly non-contestable facts (e.g., Weimar's failure to deliver on political and economic issues). One might even argue that hypotheses 2 and 3 require assessing "brute facts" – who was physically mobilized, how did the regime survive, etc. – and cannot be answered by looking solely at the discourse. Arguably, it would have made sense to confine the book's scope to hypothesis 1, i.e. to the discursive evolution of the meaning of "youth" during political crisis. The book's formidable data base and innovative methodology are perfectly suited to address this question, whereas the explanatory power beyond the discursive layer is naturally limited by the research design.

Any student of youth movements and political crises will read this extraordinarily comprehensive work with great interest. It contributes to our understanding of how regimes attempt to strategically shape the meaning of "youth" during political crises, and it highlights the discursive diversity around the topic in different historical settings. Needless to say, Félix Krawatzek's well-informed and methodologically sophisticated book cannot provide definite answers to all the questions about youth and revolutions noted in the first paragraph. Why are some youth movements successful at changing political order whereas others fail? This puzzle will continue to inspire research, but Krawatzek's book sets the bar high for future studies to come.

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**The anatomy of post-communist regimes: a conceptual framework**, by Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2020, xxv + 808 pp., index, bibliography, £105.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-963-386-371-8

In *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes*, Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics present an exhaustive conceptual framework for the study of socio-politics in post-communist states. Justifying this Herculean labour, the authors review the waves of regime research that followed the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. "Transitology" and democratization research, which was plagued by assumptions about an inevitable march toward democracy, has lately given way to "hybridology scholarship", which describes regimes with radial categories – such as, "competitive authoritarianism" – or sub-types of ideal categories – such as,

"closed authoritarianism" (5). Yet the hybridology literature remains trapped in the language of liberal democracy, on the one hand, and authoritarianism, on the other. Using the terminology of these ideal types fails to capture important features of regimes and societies in the post-communist space, particularly instances where ruling power is exercised not through formal institutions but through informal systems of patronage. Thus, the authors' central aim and contribution is to present a new language, "a systemic renewal of the vocabulary of regime analysis" (12).

The authors deliver this work in the format of a textbook. Carefully structured chapters, numerous clarifying graphics, and extensive cross-referencing are vital learning aids – though the heft of the book and multitude of new and recast terms testifies to the aptness of the "new language" metaphor. Yet the investment of time necessary to assimilate the vocabulary is largely worthwhile. The first chapter builds on and develops further Magyar's "stubborn structures" argument regarding the development of post-communist states, that is, the lack of separation between political, market, and communal spheres of social action (unlike in liberal democracies) that was characteristic of communist regimes endures in many post-communist regimes. The second and third chapters – on "State" and "Actors," respectively – introduce the arena and players described by the authors' new language. They take recent scholarship that has dealt with Hungary and Russia as "mafia states" (105–108) and literature on "state capture" and places those concepts within a coherent conceptual framework. Choosing not to mediate between existing terminologies, the authors tend to break starkly with several existing terms for the sake of clarity; it can be jarring, but the choices are typically well substantiated. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters then unfold along the different spheres of action articulated by the stubborn structures argument: "Politics," "Economy," and "Society." In each, the authors specify, justify, and illustrate analytical terms and concepts.

The book's main conceptual contribution is the "triangular conceptual space of regimes" (62–67), which adds the dimension of informality, particularly in market structures, to the spectrum extending between liberal democracy and dictatorship. Looking at formal institutions is not enough to analyse post-communist regimes accurately. Several of these regimes are directed not only (or even mostly) by their formal governing institutions, but also by informal "patronal" pyramids. By accounting for this, the authors produce a triangular conceptual space bounded by six ideal types (three at the vertices and three at the midpoints): communist dictatorship (e.g., North Korea), conservative autocracy (e.g., Poland), and liberal democracy (e.g., Estonia), which entail more formal political ruling structures, and market-exploiting dictatorships (e.g., China), patronal democracies (e.g., Ukraine), and patronal autocracies (e.g., Russia), which entail blending between political and market spheres of action wherein regimes incorporate informal market clout to bolster formal political control.

Actual cases never completely match ideal types, of course; they exist *within* the triangular space. This conceptualization permits comparison both between different cases (i.e., post-communist regimes) and of cases over time, that is, how cases develop, how they move inside the triangular space. Brief case studies in the final chapter apply the conceptual toolkit and demonstrate analyses with the triangular framework.

The authors' expertise on Hungary and Russia make the discussion of patronal autocracy particularly illuminating. Examples from the patronal pyramids controlled by Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin show how these political leaders exercise immense socio-economic power through clients and "stooges." These cases make

plain the importance of systematically incorporating informal power networks in the analysis of post-communist regimes.

In some instances, the authors are somewhat overzealous in the attempt to set out their new language, though. The section that deals with social movements and collective action (255–271), for example, (re-)defines concepts related to political protest activity. As elsewhere, the authors' new terminology is premised on the idea that existing concepts may not account for the particulars of post-communist societies – but this premise does not seem justified in the field of collective action. Existing terminology from the literature on social movements provides greater analytical leverage.

Overall, the book is an impressive freight of scholarly work that leaves behind the terminological problems of earlier strains of post-communist research. Though the book's conceptual language is applicable elsewhere, its greatest analytical leverage will be in the states of the former Eastern Bloc. Clarifying and systematising a conceptual framework that rigorously covers much of post-communist state and society facilitates finer analysis and research that can be more easily related to other studies. (Insofar as its new language reduces semantic confusion, the book's value cannot be understated). Some fine-tuning of the conceptual framework and the need for applied analyses offer much room for productive scholarly endeavours. The textbook format speaks to the authors' primary audience: the book will be a welcome resource for the classroom and for students studying regimes, particularly in the post-Soviet space.

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**Africa's totalitarian temptation: the evolution of autocratic regimes**, by Dave Peterson, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2020, Viii+ 279 pp, notes, bibliography, index. $89.95, ISBN 9781626378476

Differing intensities of coercive projection of power in parts of Africa would have prompted Peterson's title of "Africa's Totalitarian Temptation". The author sees that a political practice that denies popular freedom but appropriates a few practices to mimic democracy distorts democracy's meaning and provides a hiding place for totalitarianism in parts of Africa. Peterson's goal in undertaking the research is to address the emerging perversions of democracy under Africa's neo-totalitarian leaders. Among such leaders are some that have stood austere, incorruptible and lay claim to delivering peace and security while several nascent democracies are incompetent and corrupt (5). Peterson finds a challenge for democracy in such an emerging political trend and therefore seeks to contribute to the ideological contest for the Africans' hearts and minds (6).

Peterson's idea of totalitarianism draws from Juan Linz's criteria of: (1) monism which warrants the conflation of state, party, security, society and economy; (2) an