From Communism to Capitalism: Liberalization, Learning, and the Long Road

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In recent years, the field of postcommunist studies has witnessed a shift in attention from market reforms and democratization dilemmas toward more pressing issues such as those found in the Southeast European “Instability Quadrangle” (Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania). But as the locus of inquiry has moved to mirror the more popular or “hot” topics of ethnic cleansing and civil war, a new generation of scholars has worked painstakingly to piece together empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated case studies on postcommunist marketization and democratization. A perusal of the works under review clearly establishes that there is a great deal more to be learned from studying countries whose evolution to market democracy status was perhaps...
prematurely written—namely, Poland, Russia, and the Czech Republic. This is not to suggest a dearth of works concerning these countries, but rather that the paths of these countries westward have been neither as clear-cut nor as inevitable as so often assumed.

John Glenn notes in his introduction to *Framing Democracy* that Western observers tended to view events in the region as part of a common wave of democratization dating back to the transitions of Latin America and Southern Europe of the 1970s and 1980s (p. 2). Implicit in such approaches was the notion that Western-style market democracies, based upon competitive elections and the rule of law, were the inevitable byproduct of the collapse of communist rule. Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” argument is just the most extreme example of oversimplification via this type of generalization. But as Christopher Marsh points out in *Russia at the Polls*, “more than a decade of democratic reforms has made abundantly clear, Russia’s history is far from over” (p. xi).

We learn from Marsh and Glenn, as well as from the studies of Mitchell Orenstein and the authors in Zoltan Barany and Robert Moser’s *Russian Politics*, that the divergent paths of countries like Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic require analytical frameworks that go beyond the overgeneralized concepts of “waves” and “transitions” to democracy, as well as beyond the inadequate characterizations of transitions as either successes or failures (Glenn, p. 218). The frequently cited studies of transition scholars such as Samuel Huntington, Adam Przeworski, Phillippe Schmitter, and Terry Lynn Karl present departure points for the authors as they examine the difficulty for postcommunist societies to strike a balance between building truly democratic political institutions and creating prosperous and equitable capitalist economies, processes that are not necessarily complementary.1 Here, the talents of this new breed of scholar are crucial, as they integrate an impressive array of original source materials (in Czech, Polish, and Russian) and a wide diversity of perspectives (using studies or interviews from regional scholars, politicians, and activists) into their arguments. In so doing, each author adds valuable empirical data to the general mix, which marks these works as worthy contributions to the field. By virtue of the extensive theoretical and analytical rigor that the authors employ, they bring much more to the table than mere empirical addition.

The titles of two of the works under review—*Framing Democracy: Civil Society and Civic Movements in Eastern Europe*, by John Glenn, and *Out of the

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Red: Building Capitalism and Democracy in Postcommunist Europe, by Mitch-ell Orenstein—suggest broad-stroke treatments of the region, though it quickly becomes apparent to the reader that their focus is a narrower concentration upon Poland and Czechoslovakia (after separation, the focus remains with the Czech Republic). Likewise, Christopher Marsh’s survey on elections and democratization in Russia at the Polls and the Barany and Moser collective assessment in Russian Politics of five crucial facets of Russia’s “dance with democracy” bring the analysis to bear on Russia, in both its Soviet and post-Soviet manifestations.2

The narrower focus of these studies is not a failing, but rather a source of strength. In a broader sense, these works represent the field’s culmination from the Cold War focus of scholars and practitioners of the pre-Gorbachev era to approaches that plumb the depths of the newly emergent societal groupings and sentiments that increasingly chafed under communist rule. In addition to bringing empirical clarity to the mass of actors, policies, and events (no small achievement), which populate the landscape of the “democratization decade” engulfing the region, each author is also able to take on theoretical concepts and constructs that have dominated the field. Each author individually takes up David Laitin’s notion that “the different socioeconomic and cultural contexts of Russia and other post-communist states provide a new test of the generalizability of hypotheses developed in other contexts, improving theories of democratization by establishing how well these hypotheses travel.”3

One glaring problem that these works address is what I call “the great rush to judgment” on the fall of communism in Europe that took place in scholarly and political circles in the early 1990s. While crucial events might proceed at an exhilarating pace, critical scholarship need not. Indeed, such historical junc-tures require sufficient time for rethinking or retooling. For those who failed to stop and reflect, attempting to pour new wine out of the same old bottles underscored the need for new approaches. The governmental and academic confusion that greeted the fall of communism demonstrated that this was as true for scholars as it was for politicians.

Academically, the result was often work of a ridiculously short shelf life, full of unsupportable predictions and hasty judgments that lack lasting utility or intellectual rigor, as seemingly everyone felt the need to publish something about these momentous events, however pedestrian. Some scholars, and partic-

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2 The chapters of Russian Politics cover electoral trends (Michael McFaul), executive-legislative relations (Robert Moser), center-periphery relations (Kathryn Stoner-Weiss), economic reform (Yoshiko Herrera), and the armed forces (Zoltan Barany). M. Steven Fish ties the various strands together in a concluding chapter.

ularly the graduate students who trained under them, answered the call by going back to the drawing board and reassessing both “fact” and theory.

For example, Glenn and Orenstein critique and reformulate existing approaches to democratic transition, providing theoretical frameworks that explain the impact of paths of democratization on prospects for sustainable democracy. Glenn eschews the inevitability of a victory by democratic reformers by examining the competition among the potential challengers and highlighting failed alternatives and counterfactuals representing other potential outcomes. In the process, he calls for a reconceptualization of notions of civil society “as a master frame with which civic movements sought to mobilize public support in light of changing political opportunities” (pp. 25–26, 136–142).

Meanwhile, in his excellent case study of the Czech Republic, Orenstein emphasizes social aspects, referring to the Czech approach as a “social liberal strategy of reform,” to emphasize the distinctive mix of neoliberal and social democratic elements of the process designed to cushion the cost of reform. Through a well-supported recasting of the accepted conceptual framework (his evidence is rich and diverse), he convincingly shows that this represents an important alternative strategy for transformation (p. 7).

To be fair to the “old guard” that brought us through the comparatively intellectually lean times of the Leonid Brezhnev era, they had much less to work with than current researchers. A case in point is Kathryn Stoner-Weiss’ in-depth analysis and informative discussion of center-periphery relations in Russia. In particular, she looks at the autonomy of the regions of the Russian Federation, whether negotiated de jure or simply taken de facto, revealing a complexity of intragovernmental relationships that would have been nearly impossible to research, much less prove as convincingly as she does, during the Brezhnev period. In a similar vein, Zoltan Barany’s point in his chapter on the Russian armed forces that “even foreign researchers and journalists have little difficulty securing interviews with high-ranking Russian military personnel, who can be relied on to castigate civilian leaders and their policies,” reveals the opportunity awaiting contemporary scholars who pursue a greater understanding of the actual political processes taking place (p. 196).

The point here is not so much to castigate those who were slow to adjust to the new realities in the region, but rather to emphasize the great strides taken by a new generation of scholars engaged in empirically rich and theoretically rigorous work, covering an area of the world that had not lent itself to such academic exploitation for several generations. Can we ever anticipate all the relevant contingencies? I told my students at the beginning of September 2001 that there was absolutely no hope for U.S.-Russian cooperation under a George W. Bush presidency, yet the momentous consequences of September 11 have rendered my most astute and thoughtful observations utterly wrong. Perhaps we all should be more forgiving of those caught so egregiously off guard by “the fall of the
Wall.” Regardless of whether the new generation would have done any better at predicting the collapse or evaluating its aftermath than those who trained us, the “decade of democratization” that followed presents almost limitless possibilities for those researchers with the requisite conceptual expertise, research skills, and fellowships ready to evaluate and reevaluate policies, strategies, theories, and paradigms that buffer our understanding of the region.4

In explaining the disparity between Russia and the more successful transition countries, the authors wisely avoid the temptation to attribute the differences to democratic deficiencies or structural constraints and historical legacies. Glenn notes, “there is no shortage of writings about the demise of Leninist regimes in Eastern Europe, detailing a broad array of relevant factors: loss of legitimacy of the communist parties, the increasing inability of central economies to produce basic consumer goods, etc.” (p. 11). While the authors under review acknowledge the importance of such factors, they emphasize the role of elite choices, and the contingencies thereby produced, in explaining the degree of development of true market democracy based upon the rule of law. Orenstein and Glenn highlight the impact of political opportunity structures and alternation of policy approaches in the Czech and Polish transitions, while the authors in Russian Politics also focus on conscious choices rather than structural or ideological inevitabilities. Developments in Russia are viewed here as the product of “contingent choice decisions,” taken at the time of the transition, yet not necessarily the result of preexisting conditions. M. Steven Fish notes, “While structure, culture, and historical legacies are not irrelevant to the quality of Russia’s democracy, the latter was determined largely by the politics of the revolutionary period, which was not foreordained by prior conditions” (p. 227).

As opportunities for wider expression were created or forced open by various rungs of society in Eastern Europe and the USSR—in conjunction with Mikhail Gorbachev’s ill-fated perestroika and glasnost initiatives—the potential and necessity to break free of the Cold War preoccupation with the “U.S.-Soviet great power game” that dominated the field became ever more apparent. The books under review represent a fruition of the sea change in research opportunities and theoretical reassessments that accompanied the rise of Gorbachev. One of the few accomplishments of perestroika was that it reinvigorated Western scholars and scholarship, though I suspect that this was not Gorbachev’s motivation as he undermined decades of communist hegemony in the region. For example, Fish’s employment of Durkheim’s “constant flow of information” conception regarding reciprocal accountability in viewing Russian society is an analytical innovation that makes much more sense in the glasnost and post-glasnost era (p. 223).

4 According to the authors themselves, the works under review were facilitated significantly by a variety of grants.
Yet the entire field did not automatically or systematically embrace the fundamental challenges and unique opportunities presented by the breathtaking pace and scope of change that seized the region in the late 1980s. Perhaps this was to be expected, as old habits (not to mention paradigms) are as dear as they are comforting, and few of us part with them easily. Orenstein reminds us of the influence in the late 1980s of the “neoliberal Washington consensus”—that is, how much “developed countries had just been swept by neoliberal reforms, epitomized by the ‘Reagan revolution’ in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher’s remarkable attempts to remake British economy and society” (p. 1).5

Economic reform was conceptualized as something that could be accomplished separately from institutional reform. In an excellent critique of economic reform in post-Soviet Russia, Yoshiko Herrera laments in *Russian Politics* that both advisers and reformers failed to approach economic reform with a proper appreciation of the complexity of markets as they actually exist in capitalist economies. Nor did they take into account sufficiently the crucial relationship between markets and states, to say nothing of considering rigorously the legacy of Soviet-era state institutions. These were not accidental oversights, but rather consequences of the prevalent theories and views of the time. Simply put, the neoliberal reform program in Russia fatally underemphasized the need of institutional design for creating a state strong enough to carry through the transition to a functioning market economy. Hence economic reforms in Russia degenerated into a process of destatization (pp. 141, 160–164).

The lack of effective regulations and institutions necessary for monitoring the market have contributed greatly to two of Russia’s most intractable current problems, widening income inequality and criminalization on a massive scale. In Herrera’s words, “the superior ability of markets in handling economic problems was not replicated in the post-socialist Russian context simply by the quick transfer of outdated, but ideologically appealing, metaphors” (p. 164).

Ironically, the great Cold War victory of the West has obscured as much as it revealed, at least in terms of the lessons many chose to take from it. One lesson that was trumpeted loudly at the dawn of President George H. W. Bush’s “New World Order” was that history had rendered its judgment: the bankrupt accounts of communism at long last had pushed it into receivership, and the days of “capitalist democracy über alles” had arrived. This yielded the “superiority of market democracy” thesis, which placed free market reform in front of institution building, in the process undervaluing and underestimating the social costs of transition. In many ways, this thesis rivals only Marxism for its arrogant determinism and shortsightedness (or perhaps extreme “longsightedness”).

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5 Orenstein also points out, “Neoliberal reformers seemed to rise to the top of new democratic governments by an unwritten law of gravity” (p. 1).
In the Czech Republic, problems resulting from the “received wisdom” of the West were compounded by the Thatcherite zeal for privatization, which swayed Prime Minster Vaclav Klaus’ economic team. Advocated by Western advisers, international financial institutions, and governments, mass privatization was adopted in numerous postcommunist countries, with dubious effectiveness and often did more harm than good. As in Russia, Czech privatization “turned over mediocre assets to large numbers of people who had neither the skills nor the financial resources to use them well . . . [and] empowered investment funds without establishing sufficient market regulatory environments, thus encouraging widespread fraud and corruption” (Orenstein, p. 125). Even the Czech voucher privatization, which was aimed at reconciling neoliberal reform agendas with social objectives of fairness and equity in distribution, turned out to be both erroneous and costly. (This was also true of a similar program in Russia.)

The (too) rapid pace of privatization meant deficient regulation of the market, which served to impede economic growth by discouraging foreign investment. That massive privatization was crucial and should be achieved as rapidly as possible were critical elements of Western theories and strategies of marketization. Yet, as Orenstein deftly reveals, contrary to Western warnings and theoretical prognostication, the slower path to privatization taken in Poland did nothing to impede Polish economic performance. He convincingly argues that no group of reformers was capable of designing a blueprint for reform success and, more generally, that “economic ideologies, although necessary elements for the formulation of coherent policy positions, tend to blind actors to potentially successful policies and strategies that lie outside their ideological orbit” (pp. 126, 136).

Clearly, in charting and explaining the postcommunist courses of Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic, the authors ran head-on into widely accepted tenets that strongly influence perceptions about the processes of political and economic reform. Either implicitly or explicitly, some of the central tenets that have informed debate have come under scrutiny during the past few years, and the works under review are valuable additions to the conceptual battle. Perhaps the first casualty of these fine works is the “inevitability” thesis implicit in many applications of existing democratization theories, which were based mainly on case studies from Southern Europe and Latin America. One built-in assumption of this general notion was that the “path of market democracy” leads to a fairly specific place. Regarding this point, Glenn quotes Adam Przeworski to the effect that the ambiguous term “transition” suggests that the outcome is predetermined.6

If an adviser, scholar, or reformer begins from this premise, the range of choice and opportunity, as well as the criteria used to evaluate success or fail-

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ure, skews the empirical reality. Orenstein is correct in his judgment that neoliberals initially conceived of transition as a simple journey from communism to capitalism, where the destination of capitalism was obvious and the only problem was figuring out the precise path. Analysts began to view over time the nature of postcommunist transitions, with greater appreciation for their complexity. Orenstein writes, “Instead of constituting a simple journey, postcommunist transition involved a multitude of transformations across a variety of different spheres, whose ultimate endpoint was not predetermined” (p. 134).

An influential conception addressed by the works under review is the amorphous notion of “civil society.” The large number of studies that cite the victory of civil society as the causal factor for the collapse of communist rule represent a different version of the inevitability of the triumph of Western values. The events of 1989–1991 have been interpreted not only as a mass rejection of the socialist system, but also as a historic affirmation of Western democracy. Glenn insists that the concept of civil society cannot explain the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, nor is it useful in determining the prospects of future democratization (pp. 194, 221). Timothy Garton Ash also has warned of the danger of retrospective, sentimental idealization of such movements, and that it is a dangerous oversimplification to suggest that European societies under communism were characterized by a level of “solidarity” not found in the West.

Several of the authors warn us that throughout the decade of democratization portraits of popular support for the civic movements have tended to overemphasize the strength of these movements, as well as their capacity to overwhelm the illegitimate regimes that ruled over them. Even the highly acclaimed Solidarity movement in Poland, with the intensity and uniting pressure of a common enemy, was full of internal conflicts and divisions. “Tensions between different groups, tendencies, and regions, between peasants, workers, and intellectuals, (and several subclasses in between), between conservative Catholics, agnostics, and atheists, between left liberals, right liberals, and anti-liberals, and just between individual personalities, were constantly surfacing.”7 In his analysis of electoral politics in Russia, Michael McFaul contrasts in Russian Politics the support for democratic movements in Eastern Europe with the level of support in Russia. He argues that “the Russian ‘democrats’ who enjoyed a temporary advantage in the wake of their August 1991 victory did not have overwhelming support within either the elite or the population as a whole” (p. 30).

Regardless of whether Glenn also overestimates the solidarity in East European states, his point about the reformers in Russia supports his argument in

Many analysts and politicians missed this important factor. Consequently, many in the West (not to mention within Russia’s ruling circle) were surprised by the results of the 1993 Russian parliamentary elections, which should have sent a warning signal to advisers and reformers alike, as the “party of power” failed to meet electoral expectations in spite of a variety of (often unfair) advantages. As Marsh observes, “television commentators, who had been prepared to talk about the future of reform and the victory of liberal parties, were thrown into a frenzy and scrambled to fill airtime” (p. 66).

Approaches that overemphasize the efficacy of civil society (however defined) and the inevitability of its triumph over communist rule obscure the impact of Leninist regimes as repressive agents and their roles as negotiating partners in the reconstruction/transformation of these states. Glenn also makes the important point that “failed attempts at emergence by the democratic opposition in the late 1980s reveal Leninist regimes that had not lost control over the means of repression, while differences in outcomes highlight different political processes at work” (p. 3). He means that to some extent the outgoing regimes shaped the patterns of reconstruction independently of the efforts of the reformers. He also perceptively points out that arguments lionizing the power of civil society generally fail to differentiate among the wide array of independent activities and groups that existed under the communist regimes (from rock music to underground publishing to religious pilgrimages).

Rather than examining only the civic movements that succeeded in forming the new governments, Glenn insists that the appropriate units of analysis are the range of existing and potential competing challengers that sought to influence reconstruction of the state in the countries he examines. Consequently, he redefines the notion of civil society as a successful framing strategy to explain how these particular civic movements (rather than other potential challengers) were able to mobilize support from preexisting networks under uncertain circumstances to win.

In those heady times following the fall of communism in Europe, the heroes of the moment were those champions of the authoritarian regimes: Lech Walesa in Poland, Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, and Boris Yeltsin in Russia. Garton Ash especially praises Havel, at least his first two years as president. He writes that Havel “preached and practiced a resolute and morally sensitive moderation, civility, tolerance, and decency which contributed a huge amount to the peaceful, civilized nature of the transition from communism in Czechoslovakia.” Were it not for Havel, he argues, the transition could have been messier, dirtier, and perhaps even bloodier.8

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Just how rapidly the political environment in the region would change and how quickly the inflationary times would sap the moral standing and political capital of Havel, Walesa, and Yeltsin is one of the most fascinating aspects of the books under review. As the reviews of events of the last decade illustrate, these men held conceptions regarding democratic politics that were at odds with the views of scholars, advisers, their supporters in Western governments, and, most important, many of their constituents.

Given the tendency to dichotomize between democratic reformers (good guys) and their opponents, a key contribution of the works reviewed here is that they reveal how much all three leaders felt the need to remain “above politics,” as opposed to investing full force in democratic procedures and processes. In 1991, Garton Ash observed that “both Havel and Walesa are currently still using the formal presidential powers defined with deliberate vagueness for their communist predecessors, together with informal powers derived from their leading role in the struggle against their communist predecessors.” 9 Citing Boris Yeltsin’s and Vladimir Putin’s trademark positions of “remaining above politics” as they maneuvered in ways that would make Machiavelli envious, Moser points out that presidential elections in Russia have been arranged to allow politicians to run independently of politically partisan attachments while severely undermining the role of parties in the system (p. 101).

Each author in Russian Politics attests that this lack of party institutionalization has been the Achilles’ heel of democratization in Russia. In introducing the book, Moser acknowledges that the most commonly cited problems in the analyses are elite avoidance of or aversion to institution building, particularly among weak political parties. While Marsh also shines the spotlight on an inefficient party system, he is more optimistic regarding party consolidation in Russia, a view that might be borne out by recent developments in Russia (pp. 91–97). In 2001, the Union of Right Forces melded into an official party. The pro-Kremlin Duma People’s Deputy Group became the People’s Party; the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and its allies held an inaugural congress of a new “Russian patriots” group; and the second and third largest parliamentary vote-getters—Unity and All Russia/Fatherland—have merged into a single, pro-Kremlin party. Yet Putin, in keeping presidential predilections for independent maneuver and even while orchestrating a merger, has avoided direct association with the new party. He asserted, “It still has to earn the right to be called a party of power.” 10

From the outset, poor party institutionalization was obviously problematic for democratic consolidation for each of the countries. Yet presidential disdain for traditional democratic political processes also affected economic reform,

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which is the opposite of what most Western advisers and international institutions—not to mention many scholars—believed (although they rarely made such beliefs explicit, their views on the matter were clear). This manifested itself in the fear that democratic reformers could not trust their neophyte populations to make the “correct” choices; hence institutional checks and balances should be delayed until a strong executive presence (i.e., of a Western-oriented market reformer) could put into place those policies that would ensure that postcommunist societies were irrevocably set on a path to Western-style market democracy.

Orenstein lays out this logic in concise terms: “It was illogical to expect the majority of people to vote for a capitalist system that in the short run would cause great increases in inequality, a massive reallocation of resources, painful shifts in employment, and stressful individual transitions of all types. . . . Such transformations required a firm hand” (p. 3). Such views helped to bolster, if not justify, forming a consensus on the necessity (even the desirability) of circumventing true democratic processes and institution building in favor of supporting anticommunist reformers. But in contrast to expectations, it was precisely the countries with the lowest level of formal executive power that witnessed the highest level of economic reform.

The mistaken conceptualization that the game was one of an either/or choice of market-oriented reforms or state institution building was destructive because capitalism and democracy were widely viewed as potentially incompatible in the initial stages of transition. This also helps to explain why social policy ranked so low on the policy agenda in the aftermath of communism’s fall. Few early transition plans addressed social sector reform as a priority focus, and even up to the present time, social sector reforms have been ad hoc and reactive rather than strategically planned. This is remarkable, given the dramatic impact on social welfare programs in the transition period, not to mention the pervasiveness of social sectors in terms of government spending and employment. Across the board, the “absence of a coherent and coordinated approach to social policy reform has left an unfinished agenda for successive postcommunist governments to address.”

Considering the scale of social and economic decline in most postcommunist populations that has accompanied marketization, the relatively moderate “backlash effect” found in these societies is a curious phenomenon. As Orenstein demonstrates throughout his study, the greatly feared backlash against reform—the principal concern of both neoliberal and social democratic

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theorists—has not derailed transition. In Poland and the Czech Republic parliamentary democratic procedures, instead of resulting in stalemate, forced political parties to develop broad-based coalitions around reform strategies at a price the population would support. Even though the initial reform governments coming to power in these countries lost later rounds of elections, disputes over transition strategies focused upon the means rather than the ends of the process. Opposition groups accepted the general parameters of democratic transition, while reformers adjusted to popular demands for policies that addressed both economic efficiency and social cohesion. For example, in Poland between 1993 and 1997, center-left governments modified economic policies in favor of more social, cohesion-oriented approaches while keeping the country on the path to Europe (pp. 7–9, 129).

In marked contrast to the alternation of policies and approaches that took place in Poland throughout the 1990s, the Czech Republic was characterized by a remarkable level of governmental and policy stability from 1989 to 1997. Orenstein argues in great detail that the Czech strategy of social liberalism employed a complex set of ameliorative measures, compensation strategies, innovative structural reforms, and political institution building, which complemented the neoliberal policies of stabilization and liberalization.

Such strategies extended the life of the reform government led by Klaus, yielding a level of political stability and support both social democrats and neoliberals considered crucial for progressive reform. But rather than drive economic progress, governmental stability simply masked mistaken policies, such as mass voucher privatization, and enabled special interests to become entrenched around erroneous or partial reforms. Klaus dominated the transition until 1997, when a dramatic economic crisis revealed key economic policies to be severely flawed, especially the mass privatization program and laissez-faire attitude to financial sector regulation. After the fall of the Klaus government, expectations of voter backlash once again were mostly devoid of the destabilizing, antidemocratic consequences earlier feared.

With regard to Russia, McFaul suggests, “had Yeltsin lost [the 1996 presidential election], Russia would have followed a pattern similar to that of other post-communist countries in which those that started economic reforms after the collapse of communism were voted out of office in the second election” (p. 19). Yet dubious electoral procedures and ubiquitous campaign violations, abetted by timely economic aid moral support from the West, hindered a real turnover of power in Russia. Orenstein’s main conclusion in his comparative analysis of Poland and the Czech Republic, ably supplemented by Glenn’s informed treatment of the diversity of actors and policy orientations prevalent in the two countries during the communist and postcommunist era, is that success in marketization and democratization comes not as a result of sticking to a single blueprint of reform (whether Western or Eastern), but rather through a process of governmental change and policy alternation (pp. 128–129).
After a decade of democratization, it is clear to observers that the Czech and Polish evolutions from centrally planned communist regimes to their current “showcase” status as consolidated democratic regimes anchored in market capitalism contrast greatly to the course followed by Russia. Perhaps Orenstein is correct in his judgment that elite and public consensus on the desirability of a “return to Europe” set clear goals and helped establish policy limits that have kept the Czech and Polish transitions on course, while such factors have been absent in other states in transition (p. 143). Certainly Poland and the Czech Republic exited communism and moved toward market democracy by somewhat different routes, while Russia failed to maintain a strong state capable of shepherding the country along a recognizable path toward a true market democracy based upon the rule of law.

After ten years of postcommunist development, the processes in the Russian Federation have yielded electoralism and predatory capitalism, a political system seemingly unable to create an effective and stable market democracy. Whether Russia could have employed democratization and marketization strategies and policies similar to those utilized by its former socialist comrades is unclear and is a subject for further study. With the quality of work these authors exhibited, the theoretical and empirical groundwork for such studies is now available.