

**Steven Saxonberg: *Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism: Regime Survival in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam***

Cambridge 2013: Cambridge University Press, 350 pp.

Between 1989 and 1991, ten communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Mongolia. However, communist parties remained in power in China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba. These divergent outcomes raise the puzzle of why some communist regimes have collapsed, whereas others have survived the watershed of 1989 and persist to the current day. Despite its importance, this question has received scant scholarly attention. Steven Saxonberg's new book addresses this puzzle by focusing on the structural conditions that impact the likelihood that a country will transition away from communism. The book consolidates the main arguments of Saxonberg's *The Fall: A Comparative Study of the End of Communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland* and extends them to a larger group of communist states that have collapsed and survived.

Saxonberg defines communism as a political religion: 'It has a collection of clearly set-out beliefs, with strong eschatological and messianic qualities; it has holy texts (by Marx, Engels, and Lenin); it has a pope (the general secretary); and it boasts a "priesthood" (the party functionaries). As an ideological model, Leninist communism claims a monopoly on Truth, and calls for a one-party state and a state-run economy. In such a system, the rule of the Party is based on ideological legitimacy, not popular consent. The general secretary/pope knows the Truth, since he (and it is always a man) is best able to interpret the holy texts. The party functionaries/priests, in turn, are best able to carry out his orders. Unlike democracy, which implies multiple interpretations of the Truth, communism recog-

nizes only one interpretation thereof. Consequently, it sees little need for democratic-pluralistic institutions. Since the Party knows what is correct, moreover, it is best suited to running the economy. The texts of Marx and Lenin supply further ammunition, since they proclaim the superiority of planned economies over their market counterparts.' (pp. 4-5).

Having defined communist regimes, the book proceeds to delimit the universe of cases to which the argument applies. Saxonberg's study examines fourteen cases: Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Cuba, Grenada, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, China, North Korea, and Vietnam. These cases are studied on the basis of primary and secondary sources in English, Swedish, German and Czech. Another four cases (Albania, Bulgaria, Cambodia, and Laos) are excluded from the analysis because they do not 'present key cases', as well as due to time constraints and the absence of a large secondary literature (p. 11).

Chapters 2-4 develop the theoretical argument of the book, which rests on a modified regime typology originally advanced by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan [1996] in *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. According to this typology, communist regimes go through stages in their development. In the totalitarian stage, they aim to establish hegemony over society. In the post-totalitarian stage, regimes persist on the basis of a pragmatic acceptance by the population. Some post-totalitarian regimes evolve in a maturing direction, as did Hungary and Poland. Others, like Czechoslovakia and East Germany, are freezing. The leaders of a maturing regime are likely to step down as a result of a pacted transition, whereas freezing regimes collapse following a popular revolution. Both types of transitions are peaceful. Nationalist patrimonial regimes like Romania, however, are likely to use

force against protesters during the transition.

Chapters 4–8 are case study chapters that examine various types of transitions and non-transitions in the communist world. Chapter 5 focuses on revolutionary transitions, which arise from widespread frustrated expectations in post-totalitarian regimes that have lost their ideological legitimacy and pragmatic acceptance. Economic crises serve as a trigger for a revolt, which is led by intellectuals who operate in alliance with workers and peasants. These revolutions remain non-violent when they occur in freezing regimes that no longer believe in their ability to rule (p. 212), such as Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In contrast, leaders of patrimonial regimes like Romania and rump Yugoslavia are willing to use repression. However, Saxonberg argues, the armed forces are only likely to obey in regimes that turned to patrimonialism under early post-totalitarianism, such as Romania.

Chapter 6 focuses on transitions without revolutions in two sets of countries: the maturing post-totalitarian regimes like Poland and Hungary and the failed totalitarian regimes like Grenada, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua. The chapter traces the main events of the negotiated transitions in Poland and Hungary. As Saxonberg argues, pragmatic acceptance of these regimes was based on their reform orientation. Therefore, when Gorbachev legitimated extensive reform, the leaders of Poland and Hungary decided to negotiate with the opposition and to organise elections that would lead to their removal from power (p. 270). In the failed totalitarian regimes of Grenada, Ethiopia and Nicaragua, by contrast, regime collapse resulted from militant insurgencies.

Chapters 8 and 9 turn to non-transitions among maturing regimes (China and Vietnam) and in patrimonial regimes (North Korea and Cuba). With regard to China and Vietnam, Saxonberg argues that

non-transition is a result of what other scholars have described as ‘performance-based legitimacy’, which ensures the pragmatic acceptance of these regimes. Collapse in China and Vietnam would become likely when an economic crisis puts an end to the pragmatic acceptance of the regime among the general population and when intellectuals turn against the regime and support peasants and workers (p. 301). Chapter 9 argues that the patrimonial regimes in North Korea and Cuba have stayed in power as a result of frozen dynastic communism. These regimes will persist, Saxonberg maintains, until their current leaders step down. The final chapter of the book (chapter 10) offers some prognostication about the future of North Korea and Cuba, as well as specific recommendations for US foreign policy towards these two countries.

This book will be of interest to a broad range of social scientists. The most substantial quibble that is likely to arise would concern the need to update the discussion of the book concerning economic reform in the surviving communist regimes. This is especially necessary for Cuba and North Korea. The comprehensive economic reforms that have been undertaken under Raúl Castro [Mesa Lago 2012] make it increasingly difficult to classify Cuba as maintaining a ‘Stalinist-style command economy’ (p. 335). With regard to North Korea, the persistence of farmers’ markets and the emergence of private businesses, as well as the establishment of special economic zones and experiments with small-scale private farming represent important innovations that challenge orthodox understanding of economic activity in the country (see essays in Park [2009] and in Park and Snyder [2013]). A related point is most forcefully raised by the experience of China, Vietnam, and Laos: after three decades of economic growth fuelled by capitalism and following the elimination of all vestiges of the planned economy, can

we still claim that these regimes 'proclaim the superiority of planned economies over their market counterparts' (p. 5)? These empirical realities in the five surviving communist regimes suggest that, in a future edition, the definition of a communist regime adopted in this study may need to be amended. In sum, this is an important book that takes on a big question. Its findings deserve close attention by historians, political scientists, and sociologists.

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**David Boromisza-Habashi: *Speaking Hatefully. Culture, Communication, and Political Action in Hungary***  
Pennsylvania, PA, 2013: University of Pennsylvania Press, 148 pp.

What happens when freedom of speech targets a liberal political environment? How can liberal polities legislate effectively against racist public discourse? Who decides what qualifies as hate speech? These questions increasingly relate to the freedoms and un-freedoms in both new and established democracies that struggle with delineating the limits to freedom of speech in policy and public debates regarding migration, religious rights, and the rights of

sexual and ethnic minorities. The freedom of public debate in new democracies has received more attention in the literature, showing that promoting an unconditional freedom is likely to make ethnic and national conflict worse [Snyder and Ballantine 1996]. But the tone of pro-jihadist or anti-Muslim discourse in the West European public and political sphere indicates that any democracy can be prone to passivity in the face of hate speech.

Hungary has felt the brunt of these questions and issues, given the tone of racist and sexist speech that has gripped politics in the country since the ascendance of the extreme and conservative right in the last decade. There is an acute confusion in the country regarding the provisions of freedom of speech, despite the abundance of racist and sexist expressions in the public discourse and media [Hammer 2006] that are sometimes qualified as 'public feelings'— especially on the infamous theme of 'gypsy crimes'. Boromisza-Habashi's book presents this confusion rather succinctly with an elaboration of diverse stakeholders and their rhetorical resistance to each other on the issue. However, this is a very limited book, as the debate that the book presents is almost a decade old. Only in the final chapter, the author refers to 'the gruesome murder that took place in the village of Olaszliszka' (p. 107) in 2006 where a non-Roma, Hungarian man was beaten to death by a Roma crowd on the premise that his car hit and badly hurt a Roma girl. This incident provided a spark for much of the extreme-right hate speech and action against the Roma population in Hungary. The subsequent political action led by Jobbik and the paramilitary groups associated with it should have deserved major attention in any book on hate speech in Hungary. It is rather disappointing that neither the author nor the publisher considered the immense problems that Hungary has faced with hate speech much recently. This book, pub-