

Book Review:

Variations in Post-Communist Europe: a Worthwhile Addition

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On Baltic Slovenia and Adriatic Lithuania. A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Patterns in Post-Communist Transformation by Zenonas Norkus, 2012, Central European University Press.

This book provides a comparative analysis of the political and economic outcomes of the post-communist transformation. The author Zenonas Norkus, Professor at the Department of Sociology, Vilnius University, points out that he has two goals: first, to outline a grounded general theory of post-communist transformation, using techniques of qualitative comparative analysis as a framework for the construction of this theory; and second, to apply typological ideas of capitalism and democracy for the analysis of the state and trends in the development of post-communist Lithuania. The book is divided into two parts based on these general goals.

The first part is devoted to twenty-nine different case studies, and it covers the patterns of political and economic change during the first decade of post-communist transformation. In order to describe the initial conditions of post-communist transformation, three variables are used: (a) orientation of post-communist transformation; (b) economic mode of exit from communism; and (c) political mode of exit from communism. Hence, the analysis is related to the transformation of the economic as well as of the political system. Zenonas Norkus differentiates four types of economic modes of exit from communism: minimal, partial, gradual-incremental and radical (or shock therapy) in order to supersede the entrenched dichotomy between gradualism and shock therapy. Compared with the analysis of the economic modes, the analysis of the political mode presented by the author is not as sharply revisionist with respect to the transitological mainstream. The conceptual framework of the book integrates and relativises the claims of the varieties of capitalism theory (VoC) of Peter A. Hall and David Soskice (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Norkus claims that in its original formulation this theory can be applied only to the core countries of the capitalist world system. This means that the theory is more useful for the analysis of the alternative futures of post-communist capitalism than for the description of its present state. Norkus departs from Andreas Nölke and Arjan Vliegenthart, analysing the features of post-communist capitalism in the Central European countries and classifying them as dependent market economies (DME). He also elaborates the VoC theory (Nölke & Vliegenthart, 2009), supplementing their analysis with the differentiation of the two subtypes of DME – Weberian-Porterian capitalism characteristic for Central European countries and Weberian-Friedmanian capitalism in the Baltic States. The preparatory work for the qualitative comparative analysis in search of general patterns of post-communist transformation is closed by a brief description of the different subtypes of democracy and authoritarianism and the classification of the post-communist political regimes.

The following chapter is the central chapter of the book. Zenonas Norkus describes empirically observable pathways of post-communist transformation. He states that among 29 countries there were only 17 individual ways in which countries departed from communism. Thereafter, he tries to understand which formula has contributed to the emergence of a specific outcome – liberal democratic capitalism.

In searching for generalisations, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is used. This method is based on the Boolean minimisation, which is the reduction of a long, complex expression of individual pathways into a shorter, more parsimonious one. The number of pathways depends on how many conditions that may affect the outcome are used. Not all conceptual distinctions made in theory sections are exploited by the author in the QCA, as otherwise there would be too many conditions

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and too few country cases to explain. Therefore, the QCA is always a sort of compromise between the simplification of the research problem in terms of describing relevant dimensions of transition and empirical relevance.

Two ways or paths taken by more than one state stood out. First, the ideologically emulative (mimetic) and politically revolutionary, economy shock therapy way of the Czech Republic and East Germany. Second, the ideologically restitutional, politically revolutionary, economy shock therapy way of Estonia and Latvia. However, the goal of the author in exploiting the QCA is not only to describe the diversity of empirical reality, but also to answer the question of why an outcome of post-communist transformation was such as it was and not a different one. He cannot identify any single condition alone that could be qualified as necessary for the success or failure of the rapid transition, but emphasises the combination of conditions that relate to the outcome of the transition. The author goes further to also discuss in detail the imaginary scenarios.

The overall purpose of the second part of the book is to advance the political economic understanding of a particular case – the Republic of Lithuania. The analysis of the Lithuanian case goes considerably deeper than the analysis carried out in the first part of the book. It uses a richer data set both in terms of scope and period covered (until 2009 or 2010). The selection of cases for comparisons in this part of the book is guided by two criteria: theoretical considerations and the choice of reference countries by Lithuanian public opinion. The second part starts with a chapter entitled *Why Lithuania 'Lagged' Behind Estonia?* The author addresses the emerging disparities among the Baltic countries, arguing that the “Nordic factor” mattered most for the re-emergence of the North-South gap in the Baltics. The following chapter shifts the comparative focus from Estonia to Slovenia. The reasons for this extension are theoretical: according to the extension of the VoC theory in relation to post-communist capitalism, Estonia and Slovenia present extreme cases. The final chapter is devoted to questions of consolidation and the quality of liberal democracy in Lithuania.

Overall, the author deserves credit for transparency and the invitation to replicate and continue with the analysis using the QCA method based on his data. The author contributes to debates on the varieties of post-communist capitalism with noteworthy geographical ambition: encompassing twenty-nine countries in Europe and Asia during the first decade of post-communist transition.

References

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