

*Public Administration in Post-Communist Countries: Former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe, and Mongolia*, Saltanat Liebert, Stephen Condrey, and Dmitri Goncharov (eds.), CRC Press, 2013.

As the editors of this volume note in their introduction, public administration in post-Communist countries is an understudied subject. The book aims to fill this gap in the literature by examining newly independent states of the former Soviet Union and countries in Central Eastern Europe and Mongolia. These countries share common legacies of the Communist system, such as totalitarianism and the *nomenklatura*, that is, the Communist parties-controlled system of appointments to important administrative positions. However, there was significant divergence in their political and economic development and public administration after the collapse of communism at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Understanding factors relating to this divergence among post-Communist countries is of theoretical interest to students of public administration and related fields. In addition, some of these countries, such as Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Kazakhstan, due to their political importance, large size, or economic significance, primarily as oil and gas exporters or transit countries, might be of interest to practitioners.

This book is comprised of a short introductory chapter, case studies of select post-Communist countries, and a concluding chapter. The countries that were selected for the case studies are representative to a large extent of the diversity of post-Communist states. They include the two largest post-Soviet Orthodox Christian countries (Russia and Ukraine) and two of the smallest post-Soviet Orthodox states (Georgia and Moldova). European Union (EU) members are represented by Catholic Hungary and Poland, Orthodox Bulgaria and Romania, post-Soviet Catholic Lithuania and Protestant Estonia. Buddhist Mongolia and the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, predominantly Muslim Central Asian countries, are also included. These countries have legacies of different empires, including the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. They differ in terms of their levels of economic development, political systems, and public administration reforms and outcomes. Nevertheless, according to the editors, their common feature is their experiences with Soviet-type communism, even though many of them were not part of the Soviet Union. For this reason, the post-Communist Albania and countries of ex-Yugoslavia were excluded. However, inclusion of Albania and former Yugoslav republics might have helped to determine more precisely the effect of the Soviet-type Communist system's legacy on the contemporary public administration of the post-Communist nations.

Criteria for selection of authors of some of the chapters examining specific countries are not very clear. The authors include locally educated scholars and practitioners from the countries, in which public administration did not exist as a separate discipline during Communist times. This results in the uneven quality of the analysis.

Each chapter is devoted to a case study of a single country. A short introductory chapter and a concluding chapter provide comparative perspectives. Individual country chapters are mostly descriptive. They include brief histories of public administration and political development and examinations of economic transition, civil society, legislation, civil service, taxation, human resource management, financial and budgetary management, and public administration reforms in the post-Communist period.

The case study approach provides in-depth descriptions of specific countries, but it also leads to some debatable or unfounded conclusions. For example, the chapter devoted to Russia, characterizes the government under Vladimir Putin as authoritarian. Some scholars have argued that it can be more appropriately described as semi-authoritarian or competitive authoritarian, because it combines a multi-party system with the dominant party of power and elections with

the use of administrative resources and government control over the main television channels. In contrast, the respective chapter describes Georgia after the “Rose Revolution” led by US-educated Mikheil Saakashvili as a democratic country that adopted and implemented Western-style reforms of the government, civil service, taxation and achieved government accountability, the rule of law, and a significant reduction in corruption. The chapter authors emphasize that the reforms of the police and the judicial system were especially successful. However, the Georgian political system after the “Rose Revolution” also shared certain similarities with the Russian political system, for instance, in combining democratic and authoritarian features, such as government control of the main television channels. Saakashvili and his party lost power to a new opposition party led by an oligarch after a systematic abuse of prisoners sanctioned by top prison and government officials became public. Moreover, the new government prosecuted many top officials of the Saakashvili government for their actions undertaken when they were in power.

In the Kazakhstan chapter, its authors wrote that the transition to democratic form of government in this country was still underway and that democracy in Kazakhstan has been “developing in a zigzag fashion” (p. 44). Although its political system fits the definition of an authoritarian state, the chapter presents this as a view expressed by some scholars. The authors attribute the election of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the last leader of the Kazakh branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to four terms as the president of Kazakhstan, including winning of the 2011 elections with some 96% of the national vote, to his popularity. However, this is difficult to reconcile with other developments described by the authors, such as the disbandment and subjugation of the parliament by the president, arrests of journalists, and closing of newspapers that supported opposition or reported government corruption. Use of such terms, as “the Soviet Empire” and “the Western Empire,” to define the different stages of modernization of Kazakhstan, respectively, under the Soviet rule and the influence of the West since 1992, is also questionable (p. 44).

The Ukraine chapter argues that “the Orange Revolution” in 2004 gave start to radical changes in the public management in this post-Soviet country, for example, by beginning to turn governance from state-centered to citizen-focused. The chapter authors cite approvingly a former US ambassador who predicted a few years after the Orange Revolution that Ukraine would likely develop into a “modern European democracy” in the next 10 to 15 years and expected that it would look much more like Central European countries than post-Soviet states in 2020 (p. 11). However, the developments in Ukraine demonstrated a different trajectory, especially since the defeat of the leaders of the “Orange Revolution” during the 2010 presidential elections.

The analysis presented in the book is rarely framed in terms of specific theories. For instance, the administrative culture was linked to Communist legacies, such as the *nomenklatura* system, and pre-Communist legacies, the Germanic legal tradition in Hungary and Estonia or the tribal and clan networks in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. The book highlights the corruption involving government officials, specifically during mass privatization, politicians during elections, police, courts, public health care, and higher education, as one of the biggest problems in many of the countries. The editors note in the concluding chapter significant divergence in corruption levels among post-Communist countries. Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary were some of the least corrupt countries, whereas Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Russia were some of the most corrupt countries even by world standards. The book identifies the Soviet legacy or Soviet-type administrative culture as one of the key factors of corruption, specifically in Ukraine and Russia. Another major factor mentioned in different chapters was the low compensation of civil servants in these countries and in such states as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, and Romania. However, the

Communist past by itself cannot explain such dramatic variation in corruption among the post-Soviet states. For instance, national survey data in Ukraine and personal observations by the author of this review in a Western Ukrainian region indicate a significant jump in the extent and the magnitude of corruption since the collapse of Soviet communism at all levels of the government and persistence of widespread and large-scale corruption after the “Orange Revolution” and in post-Orange Ukraine.

Although the book chapters present original research to various extents, for example research based on interviews with government officials in Ukraine, much of the analysis is based on secondary sources. The important issue of the role of the EU integration in public administration reforms and related issues in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, and Estonia was examined relatively briefly.

Despite its shortcomings, the edited volume makes a contribution to an understudied, but theoretically and practically important area of public administration. However, it only partially succeeds in filling the existing gap. The book’s primary contribution is not so much in making theoretical advances as it is in offering an introduction to students and practitioners to public administration in post-Communist countries.