What Is the Leninist Legacy? Assessing Twenty Years of Scholarship

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In the twenty years since communism collapsed in eastern Europe and Eurasia, the political, economic, and social transformations experienced across the region have resulted in a variety of outcomes. So-called legacies of communism and precommunism have become the primary explanation for divergent outcomes across the region—including variations in economic development, political openness, foreign policy, social welfare programs, strength of political parties, and the reform of communist successor parties.1 There is hardly any outcome of interest in eastern Europe and Eurasia that has not been linked in some way to the legacies that a respective country inherited from communism.

Indeed, invoking variations in historical structures or patterns of behavior to explain contemporary outcomes has become a dominant para-

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1. In discussing legacies of the communist era, numerous adjectives have been used: “Leninist legacies,” “communist legacies,” “socialist legacies,” and “Soviet legacies.” Although we are choosing to speak about the more general framing, “communist legacies,” our argument applies to all related articulations as well.


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digm in postcommunist studies. Over the past two decades we have made tremendous strides in understanding the ways that the communist experience has shaped the postcommunist world. But while legacies dominate the explanatory framework for social scientists examining variations in the postcommunist region, this approach falls short of a usable paradigm: scholars lack a shared set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that govern research on legacies. Although we may agree that aspects of the communist era have important consequences for postcommunist social, economic, and political outcomes, and the intuition that these aspects can be summarized by the term *legacies*, this is where shared standards end.

As a scholarly community, where do we disagree? First, we do not have a clear consensus on what constitutes a “legacy” or on how to define it. Without agreement on basic definitional principles, assumptions and concepts rarely achieve acceptance as a set of shared standards. Second, not all scholars who evaluate historical antecedents as primary causes of contemporary outcomes frame their analyses in terms of “legacies.” Within scholarship that directly or implicitly invokes “legacies,” there is considerable variation in both assumptions and practices. While a lack of shared standards about the concept of legacies has not necessarily impeded individual research projects or reduced the validity of their findings, it limits our ability to aggregate legacy scholarship and to assess the size of communism’s footprints. Nearly twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can now look back at the pioneers of legacy analyses, as well as their followers, to ascertain what legacies tell us about life in the postcommunist world.

The goal of this article is to provide a framework for assessing what we have learned about the impact of the Leninist legacy in the twenty years since communism’s collapse. Taken together, what do the numerous analyses tell us about the effect of communism on postcommunist life? Is there a way to aggregate analyses of legacies when we lack a clear set of shared standards across (and even within) disciplines? To address these questions, we surveyed a broad cross-section of literature that discusses communist legacies.

This article examines the origins and evolution of “legacy” as a concept in the field of postcommunist studies and discusses the limitations posed by contemporary usage of the term. Although the literature is rife with examples of legacies, we find that scant attention has been given to developing the concept in a way that facilitates systematic measurement or the aggregation and comparison of different studies. We first propose a typology to bring together the wide range of legacies in this diverse literature. After comparing the “legacies” paradigm to a related theoretical literature—historical institutionalism, we then suggest that greater attention to the identification and measurement of legacy variables will both strengthen comparative analyses of the postcommunist region and enhance the contributions this scholarship can make to broader social scientific analysis.
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Methods and Data Collection

In order to understand how scholars have studied legacies, we gathered a sample of scholarship using both purposive and snowball sampling. First, we searched on JSTOR and Google Scholar for abstracts containing the terms communist legacy, Leninist legacy, socialist legacy, Soviet legacy, and postcommunist legacy. These searches produced many articles from the prominent area studies journals, as well as from the primary journals in comparative politics and sociology that publish work on postcommunist affairs. We initially surveyed approximately 400 article, book, and conference paper abstracts. The range of scholarship that makes reference to communist legacies is broad and expansive, covering a wide array of disciplines and topics, from geography to agriculture to cinema. We then also added books or articles cited in other works that did not appear in our initial searches. In several cases, these articles or books did not use the language of “legacy” in a central way, yet the analyses focused on how aspects of the communist past affect the postcommunist era. In other words, their work falls into the general paradigm of “legacies” and would be deemed by other scholars to concern legacies.

A traditional content analysis, which would have involved coding the usage of the term legacy along predetermined dimensions, was not a constructive approach to aggregating results. As discussed above, many of the works of scholarship that look to communist-era factors to explain postcommunist outcomes do not use the term legacy. In many other instances, “legacy” is used in an abstract or introduction to an article about the communist past, but the concept does not feature in any prominent way in the analysis. A content analysis full of these sorts of examples would not be illuminating. We excluded these works from closer investigation.

After surveying abstracts, we selected about 80 pieces of scholarship for closer analysis. Our selection of these works was purposive: we aimed to collect a cross-section of scholarship that analyzed political, social, and economic outcomes from the collapse of communism to the present. This sample also contained many prominent articles and studies that contemporary scholars have considered exemplary of the “legacies” paradigm. For each of these works, we gathered information on the following: (a) how is legacy defined? (b) what is the specific legacy identified by the scholar and how is it measured? and (c) what role does legacy play in the author’s explanatory framework?

Legacy Variables and Causal Frameworks

Use of the term legacy to describe the relationship between communist-era influences and postcommunist outcomes took off following Ken Jowitt’s discussion of “the Leninist legacy” in his 1992 volume New World Disorder. Jowitt highlights the “fragmented, mutually suspicious, societies with little
religio-cultural support for tolerant and individually self-reliant behavior; and of a fragmented region made up of countries that view each other with animosity” thus favoring “an authoritarian, not a liberal democratic capitalist, way of life.” Jowitt’s phrase “Leninist legacy” describes a systematic, negative condition, or syndrome, that pervaded multiple aspects of political, social, and cultural life. Moreover, the condition he described was not a variable, in that it was not a listing of particular structures or institutions inherited from the communist era, nor was it a factor that could vary across cases. Rather, “legacy” was a general approach to understanding communist and postcommunist phenomena.

Since Jowitt’s introduction of the term legacy, hundreds of works have appropriated it. In contrast to Jowitt’s original conception, these works frequently emphasize that there is no singular legacy that encompasses all of the ways that the communist past influences the present. Instead, they consider the specific attributes of the political, economic, and social systems, thus in the aggregate broadening the concept to consider multiple “legacies.” Within these studies, scholars found that communism did not have a singular “legacy,” but rather that elements of life under communism might be present or absent or vary in intensity across different countries.

As a consequence of such solid, innovative research, the field of postcommunist studies has catalogued a growing list of phenomena that qualify as a legacy, operating across a wide range of spheres and at different levels of analysis. Thus, Jeffrey Kopstein argues that the “material and status equality” created by communism provided a fertile ground for democracy’s growth. Other scholars have bemoaned “authoritarian collectivism,” a “free-lunch mentality,” and numerous other ills associated with the structures, institutions, and norms that took shape during the communist period. Examples that have been cited by multiple scholars include weak states, bloated bureaucracies, centralized economic planning, popular expectation of cradle-to-grave welfare, state monopoly over property, capricious leadership, ethnic identities, and informal networks of exchange. Legacies not only became variables, but they also appeared to be at work on multiple levels of analysis— influencing not only structures and institutions, but the ideas and patterns of action observed in both elites and citizens.

Our analysis illuminated four ways individual legacies are used in the literature on postcommunism. Some scholars employ the term legacy as a

4. For a full discussion of Jowitt’s contribution to communist and postcommunist politics, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, Marc Morjé Howard, and Rudra Sil, eds., World Order after Leninism (Seattle, 2006).
synonym for the communist past. For example, numerous pieces of scholarship suggest that a particular country needs to address its “communist legacy” in order to make progress in international relations, reconciliation, or economic and social development, without specifying the substance of the legacy. In such discussions, the actual content of a legacy is not elaborated, and these studies rarely seek to demonstrate whether a particular attitude, behavior, or norm that was present in the communist era persists in the postcommunist era.

Scholarship that includes discussion of specific legacies as a central part of the analysis frequently places them into a causal framework. The first use of legacy in a causal framework is as the outcome of interest, that is, the dependent variable within a study. As Jason Wittenberg has rightly pointed out, not all communist-era phenomena necessarily survive communism. Some become legacies, while others do not. Similarly, legacies that do obtain appear to have different survival rates. Explaining this variation and the mechanisms that allow for legacies to persist is an important, but underdeveloped, research agenda. As the communist period falls further into the past for central and eastern Europe and Eurasia, research aimed at explaining why some legacies persist while others have disappeared will likely expand.

The second usage of legacy in a causal framework is as the factor effecting change, that is, the independent variable. In these studies, a communist legacy is present both before and after the collapse of communism and plays a causal role in the later time period. Similarly, for a precommunist legacy to have causal influence, it must be present both before communism and in the period at which the outcome is being measured (communist or postcommunist). Marc Morjé Howard identifies two communist legacies that have a causal effect in the postcommunist period: mistrust in all forms of public organization and the presence of informal friendship networks. He then demonstrates how these two variables persisted following the collapse of communism, contributing to low levels of associational membership in postcommunist Russia and East Germany. In the same vein, Anna Grzymała-Busse identifies the legacies of communist-era party recruitment, negotiation, and policy reform. These legacies determine whether or not communist successor parties had “portable skills” and a “usable past” that persisted into the postcommunist era and could be successfully marshaled to transform such parties after 1989.

Last, communist legacies may also be a variable that moderates more immediate causal factors in a particular decision-making environment. In explaining variations in postcommunist economic reform trajectories, Valerie Bunce argues that the socialist past constrained the array of options

8. For a detailed discussion on the features necessary to qualify as a legacy, see ibid.
available to new policymakers and also largely determined which types of political leaders were able to take power.\textsuperscript{11} In Bunce’s study, policy options are driving the outcome of interest, yet these options are constrained by specific inheritances from the communist past. Studies such as these have sought to analyze the application of broader comparative hypotheses to the postcommunist context and provide explanations for variation that is not easily accounted for by prevailing theories of political transition. In these studies, the causal role of the legacy is \textit{indirect}. It limits the range of possible variables that are the proximate causes of change. This usage is common of scholarship published in the first half of the 1990s, which emphasizes potential obstacles to reform across the region.\textsuperscript{12} These last two usages—as an independent and moderating variable—are the most common within the legacies paradigm.

\textbf{Aggregating the Role of Legacies in Postcommunism}

The most persuasive causal arguments show careful attention to the conceptualization and measurement of the specific legacy variable at work. It is not our intention to suggest that scholars have been remiss in conceptualization as it pertains to individual research projects. Some of the most influential social scientific research conducted on the postcommunist region over the past twenty years relies on legacies as variables. Rather, in our view, much of this work evolved and became dominant in social science without the emergence of shared standards concerning the overarching concept of a “communist legacy.” Consequently, our ability to measure, classify, or compare specific legacies is hindered.

In our sample of 400 analyses, only 8 provided a definition for communist legacy. For example, Grigore Pop-Eleches identifies legacies “as the structural, cultural, and institutional starting points of ex-communist countries at the outset of transition.”\textsuperscript{13} Jan Kubik builds on the dictionary definition of legacy to define cultural legacies as “patterns (scenarios) of behavior or thought that are transmitted from the past and enacted in the present.”\textsuperscript{14} Wittenberg suggests that in the postcommunist world, a legacy necessarily requires that the phenomenon appeared in both the postcommunist period as well as an earlier historical period.\textsuperscript{15} Herbert Kitschelt emphasizes that legacies are causes that temporally precede the outcome and can be linked by a causal mechanism, that is, specific individual ac-


\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, Jowitt, \textit{New World Disorder}; Crawford and Lijphart, eds., \textit{Liberalization and Leninist Legacies}; and Stephen E. Hanson, “The Leninist Legacy, Institutional Change, and Post-Soviet Russia,” in Crawford and Lijphart, eds., \textit{Liberalization and Leninist Legacies}, 228–52.


\textsuperscript{14} Jan Kubik, “Cultural Legacies of State Socialism: History-Making and Cultural-Political Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Poland and Russia,” in Ekiert and Hanson, eds., \textit{Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe}, 318.

\textsuperscript{15} Wittenberg, “What Is a Historical Legacy?”
tions by agents, which are likely shaped and constrained by structures and choices around them.  

While these definitions and conceptualizations of legacies are not necessarily incompatible, they leave many key analytical points unresolved, thereby creating a disjuncture between the definitions of legacies and their analytical usage. This disjuncture might not pose serious analytical costs on individual studies, yet it impedes our ability to aggregate and assess the findings of these studies more broadly. First, it is not always clear whether scholars perceive a “communist” legacy as something endogenous to the communist party-state, or whether it is broad enough to include phenomena that took place during the period of communism but are independent of the ruling regime. For example, the 1988 earthquake in Armenia created widespread damage that took years to rebuild. Although this event occurred under the period of Soviet rule, it was neither associated with nor caused by the political, social, or economic effects of communism. Should the aftermath of this earthquake be considered a legacy?

There is also some ambiguity about whether a mechanism must be identified for a legacy to be present. Generally speaking, the identification of a causal mechanism is the burden of proof that qualitative researchers accept as a hallmark of their trade. Kitschelt argues that unless we can link the process through which a historical feature influences a contemporary outcome, we cannot presume a causal relationship. Wittenberg makes a similar point, distinguishing between legacies that reproduce themselves through “survival” versus those that continue through “replication.” He notes that conceptually, only phenomena that arise via “survival” are truly legacies. In practice, however, many—if not most—discussions of legacies in the scholarship fail to address mechanisms in a direct way, instead focusing on correlations between communist and post-communist phenomena (or precommunist and communist phenomena) as evidence of legacies and the enduring role that historical antecedents continue to play on contemporary outcomes. Perhaps mechanisms do not feature prominently in the discussion of legacies because the transmission process appears obvious: certain aspects of communist institutions and the attitudes and behaviors they engender simply continue to persist because of inertia.

The identification of many examples of legacies without a shared understanding of what constitutes a communist legacy limits the extent to


18. Wittenberg, “What Is a Historical Legacy?” 15. Invoking Arthur Stinchcombe, Wittenberg notes that “survivals” are phenomena that continue even after the conditions that originally gave rise to them have ceased, while “replications” involve phenomena that occur because the same underlying conditions continue to generate these outcomes over time.
which we can measure, classify, and compare individual legacies. First, without a consensus on what a legacy is, scholars can be found talking past each other rather than engaging in a constructive dialogue that furthers research agendas. For example, as noted above, some scholars who study the effect of the communist past on postcommunist outcomes do not even employ the term *legacy* while others use the term as a shorthand for the communist past without specifying the content of the legacy. Both of these usages contrast with the notion of “legacies” as concrete variables, which is more in accordance with the definitions above. Additionally, within all social science disciplines, there is considerable discussion about the relative importance of precommunist versus communist legacies. Without acknowledgment of the distinction between “survival” versus “replication” mechanisms, much of the nuance of these debates is lost.

Second, inconsistent application of the term *communist legacies*, especially inattention to the causal mechanisms, makes a potentially useful concept vulnerable to conceptual stretching. Kopstein and Michael Minkenberg have both suggested that at times the importance of legacies as explanatory factors is overdetermined; anything and everything found in the historical past could be a legacy that “causes” a contemporary outcome. Mechanisms linking the legacy to a particular outcome are not sufficiently specified, and the relevance of more proximate causes is often ignored.

Third, without shared standards regarding the definition and boundaries of the concept, it is impossible to measure the Leninist legacy. What are its dimensions and what forms does it take? The sheer number and diversity of phenomena that have carried over from the communist to the postcommunist period presents a challenge on several levels. For one, it has been difficult to describe or evaluate the aggregate effect of a single communist legacy. For another, it has been challenging to compare the relative effects of different legacy variables or to evaluate them in comparison to other possible explanatory factors in a causal argument. These are desirable goals for any research agenda. Unless we can find a way to assess the effects of specific legacies and their relative effects compared to other potential causal variables, we are poorly equipped to evaluate the state of the field. Furthermore, in order to establish a set of shared standards about the assumptions and practices of legacy arguments, we need to understand the unit of analysis, or level of abstraction, upon which a legacy is thought to act. All of these limitations impede scholars’ ability to integrate the findings of the numerous case studies that have been conducted on postcommunist political, economic, and social outcomes in order to understand broader, and possibly generalizeable, trends.

To more systematically assess the impact of specific legacies, as well as provide a method for comparing these potential causal factors with com-

peting hypotheses, we propose a typology of communist legacies. Drawing from the primary usage of legacy in postcommunist scholarship, we define a legacy as describing the presence of a phenomenon that came into being before and persisted after a critical juncture ruptured the original conditions that gave rise to it. While the critical juncture could take many forms, most work on eastern Europe and Eurasia implies that the critical juncture of greatest relevance is the collapse of communism in 1989–1991. Consequently, the Leninist legacy refers to features present both under communism and in the postcommunist era.

A Typology of Legacies

Moving from an ever-growing list of legacies to a rigorous descriptive typology yields multiple benefits. Descriptive typologies can address several basic tasks of concept formation, including clarifying and explicating the meaning of these concepts, situating them within their semantic field, and identifying and refining the hierarchical structure of concepts. Typologies can also play a critical role in the process of measurement by providing “data containers” for classifying actual cases within the conceptual framework.

Our typology builds on previous attempts to categorize the range of legacies inherited from communism. For example, Stephen Hanson disaggregates the “Leninist legacy” into four components: the ideological legacy of Marxism-Leninism, the political legacy of power concentrated in the Communist Party, the socioeconomic legacy of Stalinist planning, and cultural legacies of norms and daily practices from communism. Hanson’s groupings represent a useful starting point for disaggregating the concept. These categories highlight four meaningful ways Leninism would be expected to affect both institutions and interactions, and they can reasonably be considered collectively exhaustive. Yet, two aspects need to be further developed to create a rigorous typology. First, the categories are not mutually exclusive. Depending on the phenomenon of interest and the unit of analysis it is thought to explain, one could conceive of a legacy that is simultaneously ideological and political—such as popular support for restructured communist parties—or one that is both socioeconomic and cultural—such as labor unions that also provide social services. Second, the analysis is written from the perspective of elite politics and does not give adequate attention to how communist institutions and practices influenced society. For example, in analyzing mass politics, a

22. Hanson, “The Leninist Legacy, Institutional Change, and Post-Soviet Russia.” Similarly, in the introduction to their edited volume Liberalization and Leninist Legacies, Crawford and Lijphart distinguish between cultural, social, political, national, institutional, and administrative/economic legacies.
sharp distinction between ideological and cultural legacies may be artificial in practice. On the mass level, ideology is less likely to be associated with the political philosophy that shapes elite rhetoric and more likely to overlap in substantial ways with the institutions and practices through which politics are experienced.

With these critiques in mind, we disaggregate legacies along two dimensions—the domain in which one finds the legacy and the unit of analysis upon which it operates. The “primary domain” corresponds closely to Hanson’s groupings, though we focus on the categories of political, economic, and social. These three domains encompass the principal arenas in which we are likely to find factors that obtained at an earlier period continuing after a critical juncture. To be sure, it is difficult to think of a potential legacy that cannot be catalogued under one of these domains. Although these categories correspond to the principal areas that were specifically transformed by communism, these three domains could be generalized to any polity.

Our conceptual innovation lies in the second dimension, which specifies the level of analysis on which the legacy operates. As discussed further below, this second dimension makes it possible to have mutually exclusive categories, thus producing a more rigorous and nuanced classification of legacies. We differentiate among three levels of analysis: institutional, attitudinal, and behavioral.

The institutional level of analysis comprises the broadest types of legacy. An institution is defined as the “enduring regularities of human action in situations structured by rules, norms, and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world.”

23 This level includes structures, organizations, and laws as well as the norms, practices, and interactions promulgated by them. Within this category, political legacies refer to most features of the structure of the communist state, such as Communist Party hegemony, the absence of organized, ideological factions in representative institutions, and strong centralization—most of which disappeared quickly in the early years of postcommunism. More enduring political institutions include the international and subregional borders of states. This is particularly true of the fifteen separate states that previously constituted the Soviet Union. Collectivized agriculture, state ownership of resources, minimal production of consumer goods, the system of centralized economic planning, as well as the lack of protection for property rights, are examples of legacies of communist economic institutions. Social institutional legacies range from maternity leave policies that began in the communist era to the environmental destruction produced by rapid industrialization projects.

The second level of analysis is attitudinal. Attitudinal legacies describe the attitudes and expectations of individuals or aggregates of individuals (for example, voters, mothers, ethnic minorities). These microlevel legacies can apply to ordinary individuals or elites and can generally be

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measured via self-reported responses to public opinion surveys or analysis of elite statements. On the mass level, a political legacy might be low levels of trust in political institutions as well as trust in other people.\textsuperscript{24} A mass economic attitudinal legacy would be support for government intervention in the economy, while a mass social attitudinal legacy includes the expectation of social service provisions.\textsuperscript{25} On the elite level, an example of a political attitudinal legacy is the persistence and salience of regional political identities.\textsuperscript{26}

The final level of analysis is behavioral. Similar to the attitudinal level, behavioral legacies can apply to either ordinary individuals or elites, either individually or collectively. In contrast to attitudinal legacies, however, behavioral legacies focus on specific actions or inactions. A political behavioral legacy might be an employee’s response to employer demands to vote for a particular candidate. An economic behavioral legacy involves relying on the informal economy to procure goods and services that are scarce or too expensive to acquire in the formal economy. A social behavioral legacy could include an individual’s reliance on informal friendship networks to solve collective action and transaction problems. Behavioral legacies can often be measured with survey questions about current and prior activities, analysis of mass actions, or through other indicators of individual or group behavior. Table 1 provides a classificatory typology in matrix form with specific examples corresponding to the cells.

This two-dimensional typology allows us to systematically organize the proliferating types of legacies without losing the analytic rigor or level of detail that previous work has produced. Crucially, it produces mutually exclusive categories. Consider, for example, the legacy of communist-era social welfare policies. At first glance, this complicated legacy appears to fit into many different cells in the typology. But the appropriate classification simply depends on which aspect of social welfare policies a scholar is interested in. The distribution of material benefits to families can be considered an economic institutional legacy because distribution of social services was part of the central economic planning structure of communist states. Moving along the primary domain dimension, a scholar might be interested in the social legacies of social welfare policies, such as low levels of inequality, or the political legacies, such as centralized bureaucracies for health and education policies. Different aspects of social welfare legacies emerge depending on the level of analysis. Citizens’ support for welfare entitlements may be considered an economic attitudinal legacy,


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<th>Table 1. Classificatory Typology of Communist Legacies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
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<tr>
<td>“extensive and politicized state apparatus” (Grzymała-Busse and Jones Luong)</td>
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<td>Staffing of state bureaucracies (Hanson)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communist parties’ portable skills and usable pasts (Grzymała-Busse)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization of territorial administration (Hale; Jones Luong)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudinal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional political identities (Jones Luong)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belief in Leninist ideology (Hanson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust of political sphere (Jowitt)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low levels of trust in institutions (Howard)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
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<td>Compliance with coerced voting</td>
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*Note: The purpose of this typology is to provide a visual representation of the textual discussion. What is presented here does not cover all types of specific legacies that might empirically exist and contains only a small fraction of the legacies discussed in the scholarship that constituted the basis of this analysis.

*Sources: Full citation information included only for the sources that do not appear in the notes.

Colton and McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy.*
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Table 1. (Continued)

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<th>Authors</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ekiert, Grzegorz</td>
<td>Patterns of Postcommunist Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, in Ekiert and Hanson, eds., Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grzymała-Busse</td>
<td>Redeeming the Communist Past.</td>
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<td>Hanson</td>
<td>“The Leninist Legacy, Institutional Change, and Post-Soviet Russia.”</td>
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<td>Howard</td>
<td>The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe.</td>
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<td>Jones Luong</td>
<td>Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia.</td>
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<td>Jowitt</td>
<td>New World Disorder.</td>
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<td>Kopstein</td>
<td>“Review: Post-Communist Democracy—Legacies and Outcomes.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orenstein</td>
<td>Postcommunist Welfare States.</td>
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whereas Russian pensioners’ protests against the monetization of social benefits might be considered an example of welfare legacies operating on the economic behavioral level. Once scholars identify the appropriate cell for a legacy in the typology, they can consider how to properly measure the legacy. For example, drawing on the possible legacies of social welfare benefits, an economic attitudinal legacy might be measured by analyzing popular support for state-sponsored benefits.

This typology can help us assess the footprints of the communist legacy by providing a basis for comparing different types of legacies, their influence on different political and social objects, and their overall relationship to nonlegacy variables. It also can assist scholars who find that legacies play an important role in their explanatory framework by suggesting a systematic method to trace the causes or effects of a legacy at different levels of analysis.

A Comparison of Paradigms: Legacies and Historical Institutionalism

Several scholars whose work employs legacies in a causal framework explicitly situate their research within the broader approach of historical institutionalism. For example, Grzymała-Busse states that her work “contributes to” the historical institutionalist tradition by examining “the conditions under which other disgraced organizations can (re)build their reputations”; Kitschelt and his colleagues argue that the “dichotomy be-
between ‘legacies’ and ‘institutional’ explanations” is false; and Howard’s analysis “follows the tradition of historical institutionalism.” But what is the relationship between legacies and institutions? Are all legacy explanations congruent with historical institutionalism?

There is a natural affinity between historical institutionalism and legacy explanations, based on their shared attention to historical factors as a cause of current outcomes. Historical institutionalism examines “how institutions emerge from and are embedded in concrete temporal processes.” Like legacy explanations, this approach focuses on historical processes, the importance of timing and sequencing of events in producing distinct outcomes, and the lasting effects of historically contingent events. Historical institutionalism does this by centering analyses on the concepts of path dependence and critical junctures.

Historical institutionalism emphasizes the “stickiness” of institutions, noting that institutions frequently outlive their initial purpose but persist as the consequence of a path-dependent process: once a certain set of conditions coalesce to establish a particular institution or pattern of behavior, it becomes increasingly difficult to change paths because of increasing returns, self-reinforcement, positive feedback, or lock-in effects. In other words, one’s decision-making environment is inherently conditioned by choices made at an earlier time period. Many communist legacies appear to share the “stickiness” quality, and arguments that invoke legacies as constraints on decision-making identify dynamics similar to the concepts of sunk costs, increasing returns, and within-institution change.

In historical institutionalism, these periods of relative continuity are interspersed with critical junctures, that is, “moments when substantial institutional change takes place, thereby creating a ‘branching point’ from which historical development moves onto a new path.” During these


31. Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies* 44, no. 4 (December 1996): 942. See also James Mahoney,
critical junctures, agency and contingency take on heightened significance: the choices made during critical junctures create new institutional configurations that become reproduced in the ensuing period of continuity. Scholars differ on the degree to which choice is constrained in these periods. For some, agency is paramount during this time. Ira Katznelson describes critical junctures as periods of large-scale change when the advantages of the status quo are broken, thereby opening up a wider range of choice and greater opportunities for agency to influence further development.\(^\text{32}\) In contrast, Dan Slater and Erica Simmons suggest that not everything is up for grabs during critical junctures. Rather, the “factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture combine in a causal sequence with factors during a critical juncture to produce divergent long-term outcomes.” According to Slater and Simmons, some antecedents may be “critical” to postjuncture outcomes.\(^\text{33}\)

The similarities between these two approaches involve an overall analytical commitment to the study of historical causes. In practice, however, conceptual and empirical analyses display meaningful differences between work in the historical institutionalist tradition and that developed within the legacies paradigm. A significant point of divergence concerns the definition of a legacy and the role of critical junctures in producing and/or shaping legacies. In historical institutionalism, the critical juncture is where new conditions are formed that give rise to a legacy. Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier write, “A critical juncture may be defined as a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies.”\(^\text{34}\) In their analysis, the critical juncture is the moment and means by which labor movements are incorporated into political parties, which in turn creates the legacy of subsequent regime in/stability in Latin America. In this framework, a “communist legacy” denotes inheritances from the establishment of communism, not from its demise. Indeed, some scholars identify the critical juncture in central and eastern Europe and Eurasia as the establishment of communism in a given country, either as a consequence of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution or the outcome of World War II. For these scholars, the creation of communist institutions is the point of interest, and this analytical focus aligns

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\(^{32}\) Katznelson, “Periodization and Preferences,” 282.

\(^{33}\) Slater and Simmons, “Informative Regress,” 887.

\(^{34}\) Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, 29.
more closely with the understanding of legacies discussed by Collier and Collier.

More frequently, however, in the legacies paradigm, legacies are considered factors that exist before the critical juncture (in this case, the collapse of communism) and persist afterwards. Many scholars of postcommunism view the complete collapse of communist regimes across central and eastern Europe and Eurasia as a critical juncture, in which opportunities for agency and proximate causes to influence longer-term trajectories were great. The collapse of communism was an exogenous shock to existing institutions and patterns of behavior. Much of the early scholarship on communist legacies focused precisely on this holding environment, on the moment of change, and on how existing institutional configurations inherited from communism intersected with proximate action.

This disparity raises the question of the relationship between legacies and institutions. Are all legacies institutions? If so, then perhaps the literatures on historical institutionalism and communist legacies can be thought of as interchangeable. Yet, as discussed above, numerous legacies of the communist experience manifest as attitudes and behaviors, not institutions in the sense used by historical institutionalism. Furthermore, many institutions (postcommunist and otherwise) can and do develop their own self-reinforcing properties, which defy our criteria for inclusion as a “legacy.”

These differences, which have not been addressed in the literature, have important implications for how to integrate the study of communist legacies into larger debates about historical causes. First, it is unclear if scholars are speaking the same conceptual language. At a minimum, if scholars have a different understanding of the concept of “legacy,” this will likely result in different approaches to data collection and measurement, as well as variations in how hypotheses are formed and tested. Second, the legacies paradigm is imprecise concerning whether “legacies” capture all forms of historical causes. As Slater and Simmons note, not all historical antecedents are part of a causal process. Some antecedent conditions simply represent background conditions. In other instances, factors preceding a critical juncture may have a direct impact on an outcome of interest independent of the critical juncture. These factors can be thought of as rival hypotheses. We see considerable usage of the term legacy to describe background conditions or rival hypotheses, not just “critical” antecedents.

There is much to be gained on both sides by rigorously integrating the study of communist legacies with historical institutionalism. Historical institutionalism has a number of explanations for how institutions reproduce themselves and the mechanisms of incremental institutional change between critical junctures. One important insight from historical insti-
tutionalism is the “constant cause” explanation, in which the same factors that account for the genesis of an institution will also explain institutional change over time. In contrast to this view of institutional persistence, other theories of institutional longevity emphasize that institutional arrangements are periodically renegotiated, with some elements of a given set of institutions leaving or being redirected to new purposes. These theories provide hypotheses for unresolved questions within the literature on legacies, including how and why some legacies persist over time.

Additionally, the sheer volume of careful studies of postcommunist political, economic, and social outcomes that invoke legacy explanations can offer valuable new cases and insights to historical institutionalism. We see the different conceptualizations of legacies and critical junctures as a particularly fruitful area for dialogue and development between these two paradigms. In particular, should we consider 1989–1991 to be a critical juncture, given that so many institutions, behaviors, and attitudes survived that period? How do institutions reproduce themselves in times of great uncertainty and reconfiguration? Why do some legacies survive a given critical juncture while others do not? The study of communist and postcommunist development can provide analytical leverage on these crucial questions within historical institutionalism. Although scholars have only recently begun to address why some legacies endure over time, we expect that scholarship aimed at explaining communist legacies as a dependent variable can build on such insights, adding important theoretical and empirical insights to historical institutionalism.

Over the past two decades, the study of communist-era legacies has become the dominant paradigm for explaining social, political, and economic outcomes in the postcommunist region. The findings of individual studies have emerged into a legacy paradigm within postcommunist scholarship, but significantly less attention has been paid to the conceptualization of “communist legacy.” Thus, it is difficult to aggregate the results of an impressive amount of scholarship. Consequently, the descriptive and explanatory power of the legacy paradigm has been limited, leaving legacy arguments open to accusations of conceptual stretching and overdetermined outcomes. We have sought to push the paradigm’s conceptualization forward by analyzing the ways “legacy” has been employed in postcommunist literature over the past two decades and developing a typology to organize the wide range of legacy variables that have been observed.

Our analysis reveals, and makes possible, fruitful avenues for continuing research on the role of historical factors in shaping postcommunist outcomes. In particular, we believe there is much to be gained if scholars move toward aggregating and integrating the findings from various studies in order to identify broader trends. In the twenty years since commun-

37. Ibid.
nism’s collapse, myriad legacy variables have been identified, but numerous important research questions remain unanswered. Which legacies have the most explanatory power? How much explanatory power do legacies have in comparison to more proximate causes? Did the Soviet Union yield different communist legacies than the Leninist regimes of central and eastern Europe? If so, do these legacies play a role in explaining the political and economic variations we observe across successor states today? Or, alternatively, is the causal importance of differences in historical antecedents simply inflated? Do broadly observed correlations mask more complex social processes?

A sound conceptualization of “legacy” will also allow us to develop more rigorous approaches to distinguishing the legacies of communism from the legacies of the precommunist era. There are theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that a distinction between precommunist and communist-era legacies should be made. In the early 1990s, scholars widely believed that a postcommunist state was an inauspicious environment for cultivating democratic norms and institutions, an idea neatly summarized by Jowitt’s analysis of the Leninist legacy. These theories predicted that the longer the history of the totalitarian model, the harder it would be to overcome the Leninist legacy. A quick comparison of central and eastern European postcommunist states with the non-Baltic successor states of the Soviet Union seems to confirm this outcome. Yet, a closer look at any of the studies that have probed communist-era legacies in depth shows that the institutions and norms of communism varied considerably across Leninist regimes and that some of the communist-era variation may be explained in part by differences in precommunist structures, norms, and institutions.38

Lastly, another important research frontier examines communist legacies as the outcome to be explained. Scholars are only beginning to investigate the processes by which legacies reproduce themselves and to consider why some legacies endure longer than others. Coming to a common understanding of how legacy is used, defining what a legacy is and is not, and categorizing individual legacy variables are important first steps toward answering these questions.

These are ambitious research questions. Debates about the impact of communist institutions and experiences on postcommunist political, economic, and social outcomes will undoubtedly continue for decades. With greater attention to conceptualization and measurement, we can begin to assess the bigger, broader trends observed across the region and come to a better understanding of the current size of communism’s footprints.

38. See, for example, Kitschelt, Mansfeldovna, Markowski, and Tóka, Post-Communist Party Systems; Grzymała-Busse, Redeeming the Communist Past; Jones Luong, Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia; Grzegorz Ekiert, “Patterns of Post-communist Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe,” in Ekiert and Hanson, eds., Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, 89–119; and Jason Wittenberg, Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church, Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary (New York, 2006).