5  Geography, post-communism, and comparative politics

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The waves of democratization and de-democratization that swept over the Eurasian landmass in the 35 years after 1974 spawned an industry of interpretation. In particular, the collapse of communist governments from Berlin to Ulan Bator after 1989 and the emergence of 28 post-communist states offered social scientists an irresistible laboratory for testing some of their most cherished hypotheses about the nature of political change and conditions under which democracies thrive or collapse. Multiple countries emerging from a form of government that imposed unprecedented kinds of institutional, economic, and social standardization offered a comparable starting point. Even more appealing for cross-national research, by the mid-1990s the variation in outcomes was already easy to see. Considering the similarity of these countries when they began their post-communist journeys, the huge variation in regime-types that quickly emerged cried out for some sort of explanation. What accounts for this variation? Why did some countries have it easier than others? Why were some able to quickly consolidate democracies (even with very little previous democratic experience), why did others fall to move far from authoritarianism or slide back to authoritarianism after an abortive flirtation with democracy, and why did a large group end up as hybrid regimes, neither fully democratic nor completely authoritarian but something in between?

The tools and concepts of political geography seemed especially appropriate for addressing this nexus of questions. First, since the countries of the post-communist world were all geographically contiguous, they could conceivably be thought of as constituting one big "region." It stood to reason that what happened in one place would influence developments in another. Second, there was an older, if not always respectable, German and central European tradition of political geography in the borderlands of Europe, some of it invoking conservative geopolitical thought to account for shifting fortunes of nations and empires. Other strands of continental thought attempted to explain the next geographical variation in economic and political conditions already apparent to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century observers of the European continent with the notion of a Kulturgefälle or cultural gradient (Burleigh 1988). As questionable as some of these methods and concepts were, they did share an elective affinity with the intuitions of most Western experts on the region who, when asked in 1989 which
countries would ultimately “succeed” (a concept best left vague), normally pointed to the states bordering Western Europe, with the variance in success and failure increasing as one moved further east and south across the continent.

Notwithstanding this conventional wisdom, a wisdom easily accessible to scholars and the general public on the pages of the *New York Review of Books* with article after article during the 1980s both calling for and describing the “return to Europe” of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, this was not the direction taken by the subfield of specialists in political science in comparative politics in its initial accounting for change. The field of comparative politics, which had emerged after World War II in the USA, had never fully integrated political geography into its intellectual apparatus for the simple reason that it was set up to study the politics of “foreign countries” (Janos 1986). The essence of comparative politics is the comparative method and for political scientists the natural units of comparison are countries. Comparativists (as students of comparative politics refer to themselves) therefore tended to treat countries as discrete units, explaining the variation between them as the product of variations in what was going on within them individually. This method provided maximum inferential leverage by multiplying the number of cases with variation on both independent and dependent variables. In addition, for a generation of modernization theorists it opened the tantalizing possibility of some sort of universal history through which all countries pass in one way or another on their way to democracy. This orthodoxy was attacked by neo-Marxists and world system theorists in the 1970s. They pointed to the interdependence of cases – the North became rich and democratic, so the argument ran, because the South remained poor and authoritarian. This attack, however, lost traction when confronted with the success of Japan, Korea, and ultimately China in changing their position in the global hierarchy, which in turn was explained by the internal policies and features of these countries (Johnson 1982).

The first wave of comparativists therefore largely ignored the conventional wisdom and proceeded to explain variation in political and economic outcomes in the post-communist world by factors internal to the cases themselves. Hungary and Poland succeeded in consolidating their democracies because of features internal to Hungary and Poland. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan remained authoritarian for reasons to be found within the economies and societies of those countries. Success and failure were explained as a function of institutional design, sequences of reform, and the ability or inability to marginalize opponents of democracy. The spatial turn in comparative politics came as a response to this first generation of explanations, which themselves seemed unable to account for why some countries chose the “right” institutions, why others were able to sequence their reforms properly, and why the enemies of democracy could be cast aside in some countries but not in others. In what follows, I outline this shift in more detail. Yet, the story does not end there. The next section shows that once the spatial turn had been accepted as identifying an important correlate relationship, once “geography” seemed to account for so much of the variation in post-communist outcomes, comparativists began to question this explanation and ask, what is the real variable for which geography is the proxy? Some maintained that the impressive statistical relationships were really tapping into deeper historical as opposed to spatial structures. Others contended that the real causal variable underlying the spatial dependence of outcomes was policy choices made in Western capitals, especially in Brussels. In the final section, I argue that these are important addenda to the spatial turn but they do not invalidate it. Even once other, competing explanations for the variation in post-communist outcomes are taken into account, there is an important residual element of geography and spatial dependence that cannot be dismissed or reduced to other factors.

From transiologit to comparative politics

It should not be surprising that students of post-communist politics looked to comparative politics, which had been studying transitions to democracy since the beginning of the “third wave” in 1974. Of course, there was much debate, some of it heated, about whether the ideas and concepts of “transiologit,” which had developed using the cases of Southern Europe and Latin America, were appropriate for studying the post-communist experience (Schmitter and Karl 1994; Bunce 1994). The critics of transiologit not only remarked on its teleological character – it appeared to anticipate no other possible outcome than democracy – but also its lack of attention to the history of particular cases. It was probably inevitable, however, that once the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe disappeared, students of other regions of the world would find it easy and irresistible to apply their methods and concepts to a new region. Additionally, the kinds of questions that the transiologists asked were important ones. What are the modal sequences by which authoritarians code power to those committed to multiparty elections? Under what conditions is the transition peaceful or violent? (Linz and Stepan 1996; O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). How can a sense of community be reconstructed after a brutal dictatorship? How can the competing demands of different ethnic communities be accommodated? Do some kinds of constitutional structures and political institutions work better than others? Is it wiser for post-communist leaders to privatize and marketize their state-run economies quickly or does this cause political instability?

The transiologists never claimed that democracy was inevitable, but the answers to these questions implied that whether it did take root was a function of human will and choice. The literature on transitions to, and consolidation of, democracy expressed a deep commitment to the importance of human agency (DiPalma 1990). In doing so, it was responding to an earlier generation of theorists who claimed to have found a set of preconditions for democracy, the most important one being economic development (Lipset 1963). Yet the collapse of communism and the rapid fielding of multiparty elections almost everywhere appeared to demonstrate that there were no preconditions for democratic rule, or, if such preconditions existed, they were minimal and could easily be compensated for by committed leaders, sensitively handled transfers of power, and cleverly crafted institutions.
Comparativists took the next step and attempted to identify the conditions under which democracy became “the only game in town” (Przeworski 1991). Using cross-national research designs and drawing on the experience of Latin America and Southern Europe, students examined the impact of different executive-legislative and electoral system designs on democratic outcomes. One finding was that, the stronger the presidency, the less likely a country was to become and remain a democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996; Fish 1998). The lesson was clearly to choose the right institutions. Other comparativists remarked on the importance of driving the communists from office quickly in order to set the stage for good economic policy and economic recovery, which in turn would help consolidate democracy (Fish 1999).

It is appropriate at this point to note that some comparativists maintained that while comparisons are crucial, the concepts and ideas drawn from other regional contexts might not easily travel to the post-communist world. The most salient distinguishing feature of the post-communist context, of course, was the experience of communism itself (Jowitt 1992; Hanson 1995). Empirical research quickly confirmed that there was indeed something different about the communist world. For example, Howard’s (2003) cross-national research on civil society showed membership in social organizations to be systematically lower in all post-communist societies than in other formerly authoritarian countries. Likewise, transition economics repeatedly noted how different the political economy of post-communism would be due to the lack of a pre-existing moneyed middle class. Last but not least, the Balkan wars of the 1990s and at first hot and then frozen conflicts in the southern portions of the former Soviet Union demonstrated how difficult it would be to construct viable national communities after decades of suppressing ethnic identities.

But if the legacies of communism were ubiquitous, their impacts were unevenly distributed. Some countries managed to establish stable institutions of democratic representation, viable market economics, and reasonable modes of intercommunal relations. Others could not. If the difference between the cases of success and failure was really one of human will that set some countries on the right path and others on the wrong path, what explained this distribution of choices? In fact, looking at the map of the formerly communist world, it became apparent that the virtues associated with the right choices (parliamentary versus presidential government, electing the communists out of office in the first election, quickly marketizing the economy, finding a mode of coexistence between ethnic groups) were distributed in a remarkably neat and regressive geographical pattern across the Eurasian landmass. If post-communist outcomes were path-dependent, if there was a significant lock-in effect from the initial institutional and policy choices made by post-communist elites, then a natural question to ask was, what determined the path?

The spatial turn

Drawing on important works within economic geography, some economists pointed to the spatial advantages and increasing returns to scale associated with access to markets in the West enjoyed by countries bordering on the European Union. The spatial revolution quickly spread beyond economics, however. Widely available GIS software and computing capacity permitted the identification of a broad range of patterns in social and even political developments in the post-communist world. Furthermore, these spatial patterns could be tested against both accounts, i.e., those emphasizing policy and institutional choices and those underlining the impacts of communist legacies.

Kopstein and Reilly (2000, 2003), inspired by the work of political geographer John O’Loughlin and assisted by the statistical software of Luc Anselin (O’Loughlin et al. 1994), showed that the evidence for the spatial determinants of post-communist outcomes was just as compelling as the evidence for temporal path-dependence. They suggested that the diffusion of the resources, institutions, and norms necessary to post-communist success had been proceeding in a geographical pattern across the Eurasian landmass. Several tests of this proposition were performed, each designed to get at an element of the phenomenon. The crudest test was the insertion of a control variable for “distance from Berlin or Vienna, whichever is closer” from each post-communist capital city into pooled cross-sectional time series, using yearly data, with the dependent variable being Polity IV scores for democracy minus autocracy (a standard measure used in political science). The main control variables deployed measured whether or not the communists were removed from office the first elections and the Dow Jones score for bureaucratic rectitude for each post-communist country. The results were highly suggestive and demonstrated that spatial explanations, even crude ones, could hold their own against two of the most cherished hypotheses of the comparative politics literature—one stressing the impact of the transition itself and the other focusing in on the long-term effects of different legacies of bureaucratic efficiency.

A more sophisticated test using scores of each post-communist country’s geographically contiguous neighbors to predict the Polity IV democracy scores yielded even more powerful statistical relationships, suggesting that not only a country’s distance from the West but its location, no matter where it may be, exercised a profound impact on the post-communist experience. This neighborhood effect helped countries if their neighbors were democratic and hurt countries if they were caught in a zone of authoritarianism, war, or religious fanaticism. Furthermore both the Gi* and the Moran’s I statistic showed a high degree of spatial autocorrelation, something best visualized on maps (which are still rare in political science journals). Certain countries, such as Germany, Austria, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, appeared to exercise especially powerful effects on their neighbors, suggesting that with more effort and better data these spatial relationships could be teased out with greater specificity.

In addition to these statistical tests, case studies also showed the powerful influence of neighborhood. Two interesting cases here were Slovakia and Kyrgyzstan. After communism, Slovakia systematically pursued what political scientists characterize as “bad” policies. Under the would-be authoritarian Vladimir Mečiar, property was privatized to cronies, political opponents were
harassed and jailed, and the Hungarian minority’s language rights were continuously put under threat. Mečiar initially succeeded in dividing the opposition, who spent more time denouncing each other than in organizing against the creeping dictatorship. Yet, the threat of exclusion from both NATO and the European Union at a time when the country’s two primary external referents, Hungary and the Czech Republic, were about the gain entry to both, encouraged the opposition to overcome its own internal problems and unite to defeat Mečiar in a national election. Research also showed that the opposition benefited from the attention lavished upon it by democratic parties and governments in neighboring countries, such as Austria and, slightly more distant, Germany, but also from its partners in the Visegrád group. In Slovakia’s case, good geography helped overcome bad policies and choices. The same goes for Hungary, Croatia, and Poland, all of which were able to suppress the most pernicious forms of nationalism in the hopes of gaining entry to the European Union.

No such logic holds for Kyrgyzstan, where bad geography ultimately trumped multiple efforts at good policies. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, Kyrgyzstan was led by a former physicist, Askar Akayev, who had a reputation for being liberal and committed to integration with the West. His country quickly left the ruble zone and was the first post-Soviet state to join the World Trade Organization. Notwithstanding these achievements, the country’s democracy ratings steadily deteriorated. For one thing, Western attention was sporadic. Foreign investment tended to be purely resource-based and frequently sought licenses and advantages by corrupting the government. Kyrgyzstan’s powerful neighbors, especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, consistently applied pressure on democrats with the intention of heading off any contagion into their own dictatorial states. Akayev’s rule devolved into a dictatorship which was ultimately overthrown in the wake of a rigged election in 2005. Yet, despite the attempt at democratic renewal, Akayev’s successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, found equally few consistent friends in the West and quickly began subverting the democratic gains of the “tulip revolution.” The most interested parties remained the local and powerful neighboring dictators in Central Asia and Russia. The result has been a steady slide back toward authoritarianism.

Lankina and Getachew (2006) extend the spatial diffusion research program in an interesting way. Whereas Kopstein and Reilly found no evidence for the impact of diffusion from the West on Russia’s politics (hypothesizing that the large “civilizational” countries may be more impervious to outside influences), Lankina and Getachew demonstrate that spatial diffusion appears to be at work not only between countries of the post-communist world but also within them. They attempt to explain variation in levels of openness and democracy in Russia’s 89 regions. Even with authoritarian leaders dominating the national stage, they find that “diffusion processes and targeted foreign aid help advance democratization at the sub national level in post-communist states and other settings.” Their study makes the case for a “geographic incrementalist” theory of democratization through a statistical analysis of over 1,000 projects carried out by the EU in Russia’s regions over a 14-year period. The EU’s commitment to democracy is especially apparent in regions located on its eastern frontier. This interest, as well as other processes of diffusion from the West, has systematically made these regions more democratic over time even if they began their post-communist journey more closed than their eastern regional counterparts.

The use of concepts and methods from geography draws our attention not only to important sources of political change, it also helps us get a purchase on our emerging mental map of the globe’s regions. As the processes of change unfold, political geography helps us understand how new regions take shape out of a formerly singular post-communist space. As these spaces become invested with meaning (a process in which scholars may influence the reality they analyze), they will make the transition from spaces to places.

Lankina’s and Getachew’s observation, however, that the EU provided the push for this redefinition of post-communist spaces raises the crucial question of whether geography is simply a proxy for other causal processes. If true, then perhaps “space” and “place” are not the genuine sources of variation in outcomes. Perhaps other variables are “doing the work.” This idea, in fact, has been the dominant reception of the spatial turn within comparative politics. The reaction of most comparativists, rather than seeking to advance the spatial diffusion paradigm within the discipline, has been to look for more powerful domestic temporal processes that have shaped politics in the region.

Although the correlations between space and location, on the one hand, and political outcomes, on the other hand, are powerful, what exactly is performing the heavy lifting in geographic explanations? In the Slovak case, it was the prospect for joining Western economic and security structures that created the impetus for democratic change. Geography, then, seems to be a reasonable proxy for the geopolitical design of Western international institutional builders who desired Slovak membership in order to shore up Western Europe’s eastern periphery. In the Kyrgyz case, would-be democrats had no such institution to which to refer. On the contrary, those pointing to friends in the region could only identify autocrats. These logics, however, have not been entirely convincing to students of comparative politics. Instead, comparativists have sought greater clarity in causal chains linking space or place to political outcomes than has been provided by scholars to date. It is to these studies that we now turn.

Geography as a proxy: for what?

Even when rejecting the use of concepts and methods from geography, a number of authors working on post-communism have attempted to address the spatial turn. Judging by its frequent inclusion in multivariate models of the determinants of democracy and dictatorship in the post-communist region, political geography has been accepted within the subfield. The consensus, however, is that the few extant efforts to use the insights of political geography to account for variation in regime-type outcomes have been more suggestive than decisive. Comparativists have generally argued that the statistical evidence for spatial dependence is really tapping into other, deeper factors besides geography.
Kitschelt (2003), in particular, maintains that the neat geographically regressive pattern of development of the post-communist world is really a function of pre-existing patterns of modernization. The notion that the starting point for the post-communist countries was essentially the same, he argues, is mistaken. Instead Kitschelt identifies three different kinds of communism, each corresponding to different state traditions. "Bureaucratic communism," relying on a pre-existing state with high levels of bureaucratic rectitude, dominated East Germany and Czechoslovakia. "National accommodative communism," which attempted to reconcile communist rule to patterns of a highly mobilized civil society, was the model in Hungary and Poland. The third model, "patrimonial communism," established itself in Romania, Bulgaria, and presumably throughout the non-Baltic Soviet Union, where the communists, upon seizing power, confronted pre-bureaucratic state structures. Patterns of communist state-building in turn shaped both patterns of civil development and bureaucratic efficiency passed on to the post-communist democracies. In short, communism was forced to build states and manage societies with the raw material at hand and these states and societies bequeathed to the post-communist world much of the same bureaucratic and civic cultures of the pre-communist era. It is these kinds of causal chains that remain most appealing to students of comparative politics.

Similarly, Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) also maintain that geography is primarily tapping into the modernization phenomenon and the determinants of both the mode of exit from communism and post-communist political change are more readily found in the formative nation-building experiences of particular political units across the continent. If a group became literate before communism, they maintain, it was far more likely to cast off the communist legacy and consolidate democracy after 1989 than if it did not. Again, for Darden and Grzymala-Busse the long-term historical causal chains are the point where the mind rests. The key to a good explanation for most comparativists, then, is to look for critical historical junctures within societies rather than identify contemporary or historical confining conditions in processes that occur between them.

The most extensive statistical test to date of this debate has been performed by Pop-Eleches (2007). For the most part, he concurs with Kitschelt and Darden/Grzymala-Busse. Numerous model specifications and conceptualizations of dependent variables for democratic and non-democratic outcomes (Politics IV, Freedom House, and Voice and Accountability), show that historical legacies continue to predict democracy and autocracy well even when spatial factors are taken into account. Equally, however, geography cannot easily be eliminated as an independent explanatory factor in accounting for post-communist political outcomes.

If some comparativists maintain that geography is a proxy for historical legacies, others have argued that it is mostly an expression of the politics of EU enlargement. The strict regime of conditionality and monitoring imposed on the post-communist candidate states and the requirement that they pass the entire corpus of EU law into national legislation decisively influenced almost every aspect of politics in the region. In everything from minorities policy to the holding of free and fair elections, the prospect of membership determined the course of events through 2008. Geography's statistical significance and substantive effect, so the argument runs, is actually an artifact of the EU's decision to admit countries geographically contiguous with existing member states. Of course, this argument in no way contradicts the notion that geography drives events. It simply pinpoints geopolitics and trade interests as the underlying force for why location matters.

Vachudova (2005) distinguishes between the EU's passive versus active leverage in post-communist Europe. Immediately after 1989, the prospect for admission did alter preferences in the region but not, Vachudova contends, in decisive ways. It was not until the decision was made in 1999 to begin negotiations that the leverage of the West over the East moved from being passive to active and the regime of conditionality and monitoring really began to shape events. Cameron (2007) puts the date of active leverage much earlier, to the early 1990s, when the post-communist states began to sign Association Agreements with Brussels. These agreements in essence amounted to "holding pens" for countries while the member states decided upon whether and when to begin formal negotiation on membership. Both Vachudova and Cameron are correct in this respect. The EU has much more direct influence over Croatia and Turkey, as both actively negotiate for membership, but nevertheless retains an important voice even within Serbia, which has expressed interest in signing its own Association Agreement. Both authors, however, pitch their arguments in opposition to spatial explanations. Cameron even deploys spatial control variables in his main regression.

Theoretically the EU could decide to admit countries that do not share borders at all with the EU and membership conditionality would still profoundly shape political outcomes. In this sense, geographic diffusion and EU conditionality are conceptually distinct phenomena. The fact remains, however, that the EU's decisions on where it will enlarge and which countries start down the road of negotiation are deeply political and this political logic is intimately related to geopolitics and trade policy. The discourse on Europe's borders and whether or not Turkey's negotiations should be drawn out or cancelled reflects deep divides over whether it is a good idea for a poor and non-European (read: Muslim) country to join the EU. In short, it is difficult to disentangle the logic of EU conditionality from the geopolitics of enlargement.

In what is probably the most comprehensive treatment of the relationship of EU conditionality to the role of geography, Levitsky and Way (forthcoming) conceptualize the matter as one of "linkage" and "leverage." Linkage refers to the connections between countries that may occur through trade, investment, tourism, and the like. Leverage, on the other hand, refers to the power or influence of international organizations over a target country that desires membership, approval, or resources from the organization. Although the authors acknowledge the leverage exercised by the EU over candidate states, they also argue that in the 1990s geographical proximity to Western Europe promoted important linkages that weakened autocrats even in countries with little immediate prospect for membership, such as Macedonia, Albania, Croatia, and Serbia. "[I]n each of these cases, Western intervention significantly weakened autocratic incumbents and
strengthened democratic forces – leading to democratization in Croatia and Serbia and near democratization in Albania and Macedonia by 2005" (Levitsky and Way, forthcoming). This line of argumentation suggests that rather than geography being a proxy variable for EU membership, the reverse may in fact also be true: EU membership is actually a proxy variable for geography. Even without the straitjacket of membership conditionality, geography may influence outcomes by way of linkage rather than leverage.

In fact, it may be the case that some version of “pure” geography may influence political outcomes independent of any linkage or leverage. The evidence from post-communist Europe suggests that people living in proximity to the West believe that their fate somehow matters more to Europe and Europeans than those further East. They think of themselves as Europeans and consider “European standards” as something worth respecting. Of course, this sense of Europeanness is historically constructed and reconstructed, yet the fact remains that it is easier to make European arguments in places closer to the entity that now calls itself Europe – the EU – than in locations that are far away and about which Europe cares little. This geography of affection and knowledge is difficult to measure but there can be little doubt that it has helped shape the post-communist political landscape.

Geography, post-communism, and comparative politics

The subfield of comparative politics may represent a hard case for sustaining the influence of spatial concepts and methods. What accounts for the reluctance of students of comparative politics and post-communism to accept the spatial paradigm rather than attempting to refute it? It is certainly possible that it is a purely a matter of evidence. If the evidence sustained the assertion that spatial diffusion determined outcomes more consistently than did internal politics, political geography would be accepted as part of the mainstream of the field. Political geography remains marginal, so the argument runs, because it deserves to stay marginal.

The evidence, however, that evidence matters in the development of the social sciences remains meager at best. Paradigms neither rise nor fall because of evidence. A much more likely candidate for explaining the continued marginalization of political geography within comparative politics is to be found in the specific history of comparative politics within North American political science. The field of political science, as it developed in the United States after World War II, divided into multiple subdisciplines. One of the most important disciplinary divides was that between international relations, which studies primarily war and trade between states, and comparative politics, which was originally set up to study the domestic politics of “foreign countries.” This division of labor made a certain degree of sense, since the latter pursuit required deep immersion into exotic histories and frequently difficult foreign languages. Yet, it was probably equally silly to believe that patterns of war and trade could be explained without reference to domestic politics as it was to believe that the domestic politics of states unfolded as if they were not located in given locations, with particular neighbors, and specific physical geographies.

Of course, students of both subdisciplines quickly recognized this, but there quite understandably remained a disciplinary bias within each field against accepting methods that question its assumptions. All disciplines have conceits and the major conceit of comparative politics is that, at a minimum, mid-level generalizations and patterns can be gleaned by comparing the politics of two more states. Simple enough and probably true. But the comparative method depends on one basic assumption: unit homogeneity. If the politics of the units under observation are influencing each other, then the assumption is violated, the “experiment” is contaminated, no generalizations or patterns can be found, and the entire field of comparative politics is called into question. The methods of political geography, especially those involving statistics measuring spatial auto-correlation, were designed almost specifically to question the assumption of the independence of the units under observation, for the simple reason that they measure just how much the units do influence each other. Should we be surprised at the resistance to methods and concepts as mainstream modes of analysis when these methods and concepts threaten the very foundations of the field? This issue, of course, is more a matter of the sociology of inquiry than of inquiry itself but it probably better accounts for the place of geography in comparative politics than any adjudication of the evidence or model of normal science.

Even with this resistance, political geography refuses to leave comparative politics alone. Discussions of Galton’s problem (which posits the difficulty in using cross-cultural data because of external dependencies), “regions” in world politics, and the role of “public space” in channeling political discourse represent a few of myriad ways in which spatial thinking has infected the subfield. One suspects at some point that testing for spatial effects in cross-national research will become standard in the best journals, if for no other reason than it will help decipher some of the important puzzles in comparative politics.