

Isabelle DeSisto

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RESEARCH INTERESTS *Substantive:* political violence, forced displacement, public opinion, revolutions; historical legacies; Eastern Europe; Central Asia.

Methodological: public opinion surveys, qualitative interviews, archival research, geographic information systems (GIS), quantitative text analysis.

EDUCATION **Princeton University**

Ph.D., Politics (expected 2027)

Subfields: Comparative Politics (major), Post-Communist Politics, Quantitative Methods

Dissertation: “Evaluating The Long-Term Effects of Communist Violence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia”

Committee: Mark Beissinger & Grigore Pop-Eleches (Co-Chairs), Elizabeth Nugent

M.A., Politics (2023)

University of Cambridge

MPhil, Politics & International Studies, *with distinction* (2021)

Thesis: “Explaining Divergent Foreign Aid Flows to Belarusian and Ukrainian Children After the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, 1986 – 2011” (Supervisor: Ayşe Zarakol)

Harvard University

M.A., Regional Studies: Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia (2020)

B.A., Government, *summa cum laude* with highest departmental honors

Minor in Spanish & certificate in Latin American Studies.

Study abroad in Havana, Cuba (Fall 2018)

Thesis: “From the ‘Island of Freedom’ to the Iron Curtain: Rethinking the Role of Soft Power in Soviet-Cuban Educational Exchange Programs” (Advisor: George Soroka)

WORKING PAPERS

“[Socio-Economic Development and the Uneven Legacies of Authoritarian Repression.](#)” *Forthcoming in the Journal of Historical Political Economy.*

“The Threshold Effect: Preference Falsification Versus Weak Preferences in Russian War Support.” With Grigore Pop-Eleches & Jacob Tucker. *R&R at the British Journal of Political Science.*

“The Effects of Decentralization on Local Governance: Evidence from Ukraine.” With Grigore Pop-Eleches & Graeme Robertson. *R&R at Comparative Political Studies.*

“[How Exile Escalates Revolutions.](#)” With Elizabeth Nugent. *Under review.*

“Revolution and Deforestation: A Global Panel Analysis.” With Camille DeSisto. *Under review.*

“Family Repression and Political Mobilization Across Regime Types.”

“Past Repression, Present Solidarity: Mnemonic Opportunities in Wartime.”

“Source Credibility and Persuasion Under Autocracy.” With Laura Howells, Grigore Pop-Eleches, & Jacob Tucker.

“The Political Consequences of Wartime Casualties in Russia.” With Laura Howells, Grigore Pop-Eleches, & Jacob Tucker.

“Inducing Support for Ukraine at War: A Cross-Country Survey Experiment in Eastern Europe.” With Felix Beilin, Laura Howells, Grigore Pop-Eleches, and Jacob Tucker.

ACADEMIC
PUBLICATIONS

Félix Krawatzek, **Isabelle DeSisto** & George Soroka. 2023. [Russians in the South Caucasus: Political Attitudes and the War in Ukraine](#). *ZOIS Report*.

(Press coverage in: [RFE/RL](#), [Voice of America](#), [DW](#), [Re: Russia](#) and elsewhere.)

Isabelle DeSisto. 2022. [Expectations Versus Reality: Cuban Students’ Encounters with Late Soviet Socialism](#). *Cahiers du monde russe*.

PUBLIC
SCHOLARSHIP

Writing (selected)

“Kazakhstan’s new anti-LGBT legislation sparks controversy,” *Good Authority*, 27 Jan. 2026.

“Kak pamiat’ o sovetskikh repressiiakh formiruet solidarnost’ estontsev s Ukrainoi?” [How does the memory of Soviet repression shape Estonians’ solidarity with Ukraine?], *Rus.Postimees*, 13 Jan. 2026.

“Remembering Repression: Charting the Political Legacies of Soviet Repressions,” *Peripheral Histories*, 18 Dec. 2025.

“East-Central Europe saw 5 dramatic elections in 2025,” *Good Authority*, 12 Dec. 2025.

“Central Asian leaders forge new deals with Trump,” *Good Authority*, 12 Nov. 2025.

“Parlamentskie vybory v Moldove: proevropeiskaia partiia poluchila bol’shinstvo, no obshchestvo ostaetsia razdelennym” [Parliamentary elections in Moldova: the pro-European party won a majority, but society remains divided], *Rus.Postimees*, 7 Oct. 2025.

“Despite Russian meddling, Moldova’s pro-Europe party wins a majority,” *Good Authority*, 3 Oct. 2025 (with Grigore Pop-Eleches).

“In Ukraine, women are having fewer children,” *Good Authority*, 12 Sep. 2025.

“Ukrainians continue to champion the fight against corruption,” *Good Authority*, 8 Aug. 2025.

“What is authoritarian backscratching – and why is this a threat?,” *Good Authority*, 24 Jul. 2025.

“Targeting international students cuts into U.S. soft power,” *Good Authority*, 25 Jun. 2025.

“Russia’s ‘Victory Frenzy’ is another weapon against Ukraine,” *Good Authority*, 8 May 2025.

“Sartorial diplomacy in the White House,” *Good Authority*, 3 Apr. 2025.

“What Ukrainians think about peace talks and ending the war,” *Good Authority*, 3 Mar. 2025.

“Endorsements and Incumbency in Moldova’s 2020 and 2024 Elections,” *Moldovan Analytical Digest*, Jan. 2025 (with Grigore Pop-Eleches).

“Moldova chooses Europe again as Sandu wins re-election,” *Good Authority*, 12 Nov. 2024 (with Grigore Pop-Eleches).

“The high stakes in Moldova’s 2024 election,” *Good Authority*, 30 Oct. 2024 (with Grigore Pop-Eleches).

“A Russian destabilization campaign put Moldova in the news,” *Good Authority*, 4 Mar. 2024 (with Grigore Pop-Eleches).

Interviews & Media

“GEN STRAKHA: Proshloe upravliaet nami?/ Izabel’ DeSisto, issledovatel’nitsa” [THE FEAR GENE: Does the past control us?], Zhiza podcast (Kazakhstan), 22 Jan. 2026.

“Why Estonians Support Ukrainians,” Pacifica Network’s Ukraine 242, 29 Oct. 2025.

“Moldova’s Pivotal Election Sets Back Russian Influence,” Pacifica Network’s Ukraine 242, 8 Oct. 2025.

“The Times at One with Tom Whipple” (on Russian public opinion), *The Times*, 22 May 2025.

“Isabelle DeSisto: Istoria bunicilor marchează atitudinile politice ale nepoților” [The history of grandparents marks the political attitudes of grandchildren], *Veridica.md*, 7 May 2025.
 “Scholars’ Circle – Moldova Election 2024,” Scholars’ Circle, 24 Nov. 2024.
 “Challenges and New Trends in Ukrainian Studies,” ASEEEES NewsNet, 6 Nov. 2024.
 “Watching Russia: Where does Russian public sentiment on politics and war stand these days?” Bear Market Brief (FPRI podcast), 2 Nov. 2023.
 “Latin America split over response to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine,” Univision, 3 Mar. 2022.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS American Political Science Assoc. Annual Meeting (2025, 2024, 2023)
 Assoc. for the Study of Nationalities Convention (2026*, 2025, 2024, 2023)
 Assoc. for Slavic, East European, & Eurasian Studies Convention (2024, 2023, 2021, 2020)

*UPCOMING
 Bridges in the Baltics Conference (2025)
 Council for European Studies Conference (2021)
 Midwest Political Science Assoc. Conference (2026*, 2025, 2024, 2021)
 Southern Political Science Assoc. Conference (2026, 2025)
 Taras Shevchenko Conference for Ukrainian Studies, Indiana University (2020)

Selected workshop presentations and lectures:

2026*: Toulouse School of Economics (France)
 2025: Skytte Institute, University of Tartu (Estonia); Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan)
 2024: Davis Center (Harvard)
 2023: Harriman Institute (Columbia)

FELLOWSHIPS & GRANTS
 2025. Estophilus Scholarship from Republic of Estonia Education and Youth Board. 2,140€.
 2025. P.E.O. Scholar Award. \$25,000.
 2025. American Councils Title VIII Research Scholar grant. (Travel & living expenses for 4 months of fieldwork in Fall 2025; approx. \$10,000.) *Suspended by Trump administration.*
 2025. Institute for Humane Studies. \$5,000.
 2025. Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. \$4,000.
 2022-25. Bobst Center Graduate Dissertation Grants (Princeton). \$12,000 total.
 2024. Multi-Center Graduate Dissertation Grant (Princeton). \$15,000.
 2022-24. Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. \$10,300 total.
 2024-26. Stafford Funding for Conference Travel (Princeton). \$3,500 total.
 2023. Estonian government scholarship for language study. 825€.
 2023. Workshop on Post-Communist Politics grant (Bobst Center, Princeton). \$3,000.
 2022. Department of Politics & Program in Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (Princeton). Funding for Ukrainian language study. \$1,300.
 2022. Data-Driven Social Science Initiative small grant (Princeton). \$4,550.
 2021-Present. Centennial Fellowship (Princeton).
 2020-21. Eben Fiske Studentship (Trinity College, Cambridge). Full tuition.
 2020. Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute Scholarship (Harvard). \$6,680
 2019. David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Grant (Harvard). \$3,000.
 2017-19. Goldman Undergraduate Research Grant (Harvard). \$6,500 total.
 2019. Government Department Chair’s Research and Travel Fellowship (Harvard). \$2,750.
 2018. Weissman International Internship Program Grant (Harvard). \$5,500.
 2017. Institute of Politics Summer Stipend (Harvard). \$1,500.

AWARDS
 2024. McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning (Princeton). Exemplar Mentor Award.
 2024. *Nationalities Papers* Photo Contest.
 2020. Freund Prize (Harvard). For seniors graduating *summa cum laude* with highest GPA.
 2020. Hoopes Prize (Harvard). For “outstanding scholarly work” on senior thesis.

2020. Hammond Prize in Latin American Studies (Harvard). For the best undergraduate honors thesis related to Spanish-speaking Latin America.
2020. Crosby Prize (Harvard). For “excellence” in Government major.
2020. Government Department Thesis Symposium Audience Prize (Harvard).
2020. 3rd Prize Graduate Award (Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy).
2019. Bonaparte Prize (Harvard). For junior w/ “highest academic distinction” in Gov dept.
2019. Phi Beta Kappa, Junior 24 (Harvard). First induction into PBK; elected Marshal.
2017-18. John Harvard Scholar (Harvard). Top 5% of the class.

TEACHING Teaching Assistant, Princeton University

PIIRS Global Seminar in Romania (Summer 2025)
“Region at a Crossroads: Eastern Europe & the Black Sea between Russia & the West”
Primary instructors: Grigo Pop-Eleches & Nadia Crisan
Locations: Cluj-Napoca & Sibiu, Romania

POL300: “Conducting Independent Research in Political Science” (Fall 2024)
Head Preceptor (TA) for technical track
Primary instructors: John Kastlelec, Rocío Titiunik
Average student rating: 4.75/5

POL376: “Dictators and Their Demise” (Spring 2024)
Primary instructor: Xu Xu
Average student rating: 4.5/5

POL360: “Social Movements and Revolutions” (Fall 2023)
Primary instructor: Mark Beissinger
Average student rating: 4.7/5

Completed a “Teaching Transcript” through the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning

OTHER
RESEARCH
EXPERIENCE
& SKILLS

Languages: Russian, Spanish (fluent); Ukrainian, Romanian (advanced); Estonian (basic)

Fieldwork during PhD: Moldova (7 months), Estonia (3 months), Kazakhstan (2 months), Latvia (2 weeks); before PhD: Russia (1.5 months), Cuba (2 months), Kyrgyzstan (2 months)

The *Russia Watcher* Project  @russia_watcher  <https://russiawatcher.com/>
With Grigore Pop-Eleches, Jacob Tucker & Laura Howells
Daily tracking survey of Russian public opinion
Recipient of \$400K National Science Foundation grant
Coverage in: [The New York Times](#); [The Moscow Times](#); [The Hill](#); [FPRI](#); Times Radio.

Training: Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (2024)

Technical Skills: RStudio, LaTeX, ArcGIS

SERVICE Reviewer for the *Journal of Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, and *Cahiers des Amériques latines*.

REFERENCES **Mark Beissinger**
Grigore Pop-Eleches
Elizabeth Nugent

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 gpop@princeton.edu
 enugent@princeton.edu

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