

# Isabelle DeSisto

CONTACT 100 Fisher Hall  
Princeton, NJ 08540

✉ [isabelledesisto@princeton.edu](mailto:isabelledesisto@princeton.edu)  
🌐 [isabelledesisto.com](http://isabelledesisto.com)

---

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: “Repression Remembered: How Violence Shapes Political Behavior Across Generations”

Committee: Mark Beissinger & Grigo 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)

---

PUBLISHED PAPERS “Socio-Economic Development and the Uneven Legacies of Authoritarian Repression.” *Journal of Historical Political Economy*, 2026. [[Online appendix](#)] [[Replication files](#)]

“The Effects of Decentralization on Local Governance: Evidence From Ukraine.” With Grigo Pop-Eleches & Graeme Robertson. *Comparative Political Studies*, 2026. [[Online appendix](#)] [[Replication files](#)]

“Expectations Versus Reality: Cuban Students’ Encounters with Late Soviet Socialism.” *Cahiers du monde russe*, 2022. [Pre-PhD; based on Master’s thesis]

---

WORKING PAPERS “The Threshold Effect: Separating Preference Falsification From Weak Preferences in Russian Attitudes Toward the War in Ukraine.” With Grigo Pop-Eleches & Jacob Tucker. *R&R at the British Journal of Political Science*.

“Revolution and Deforestation: A Global Panel Analysis.” With Camille DeSisto. *R&R at the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

“Family Repression and Political Mobilization Across Regime Types.” *Under review*.

“How Exile Escalates Revolution.” With Elizabeth Nugent. *Under review*.

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

“Explaining Solidarity with Foreign War Victims: Empathy versus Threat.” With Felix Beilin, Laura Howells, Grigo Pop-Eleches, & Jacob Tucker. *Under review*.

“Countering Authoritarian Propaganda: Evidence from Russia at War.” With Laura Howells, Grigo Pop-Eleches, & Jacob Tucker.

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

---

OTHER  
PUBLICATIONS

“Russians in the South Caucasus: Political Attitudes and the War in Ukraine.” *ZOiS Report*. 2023. With Félix Krawatzek & George Soroka.  
(Press coverage in: [RFE/RL](#), [Voice of America](#), [DW](#), [Re: Russia](#) and elsewhere.)

“Endorsements and Incumbency in Moldova’s 2020 and 2024 Elections.” *Moldovan Analytical Digest*, Jan. 2025. With Grigo Pop-Eleches.

---

PUBLIC  
SCHOLARSHIP

**Writing (selected; see website for comprehensive list)**

“Did Magyar’s rural tour help him win Hungary’s election?” *Good Authority*, 5 May 2026 (With Grigo Pop-Eleches).

“Is exile a dead end – or a launching pad for opposition?,” *Good Authority*, 25 Feb. 2026.

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

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

“Parlamentskie vybory v Moldove: proevropeiskaia partiia poluchila bol’shinstvo, no obshchestvo ostaetsia razdelenym” [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 Grigo Pop-Eleches).

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Interviews & Media**

“The Motivation of Memory in Estonian Politics.” Baltic Ways Podcast, Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies & Foreign Policy Research Institute, 26 Mar. 2026.

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

**Selected workshop presentations and lectures:**

2026: Northeast Regional Workshop in European Politics; Harvard Political Violence Workshop; Toulouse School of Economics; Shevchenko Workshop in Ukrainian Studies\* (UMich)

2025: Skytte Institute, University of Tartu; Nazarbayev University

2024: Davis Center (Harvard)

2023: Harriman Institute (Columbia)

---

FELLOWSHIPS & GRANTS	2021-Present. Centennial Fellowship (Princeton). 2024-26. Stafford Funding for Conference Travel (Princeton). \$4,200 total. 2025-26. Dean’s Fund for Scholarly Travel (Princeton). \$1,400 total. 2025. P.E.O. Scholar Award. \$25,000. 2025. Estophilus Scholarship from Republic of Estonia Education and Youth Board. 2,140 euro. 2025. American Councils Title VIII Research Scholar grant. ~\$10,000. <i>Suspended by Trump admin.</i> 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. 2023. Estonian government scholarship for language study. 825 euro. 2023. Workshop on Post-Communist Politics grant (Bobst Center, Princeton). \$3,000. 2022. Data-Driven Social Science Initiative small grant (Princeton). \$4,550. 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.
-------------------------	---

---

AWARDS	2026. Elmer Adler Book Collecting Prize. 2024. McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning (Princeton). Exemplar Mentor Award. 2024. <i>Nationalities Papers</i> Photo Contest. 2020. Freund Prize (Harvard). For seniors graduating <i>summa cum laude</i> 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

POL300: “Conducting Independent Research in Political Science” (Fall 2024)  
Primary instructors: John Kastellec, 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://twitter.com/russia_watcher)  <https://russiawatcher.com/>  
With Grigo 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, ArcGIS, LaTeX, Qualtrics

---

SERVICE




Organizer, Workshop on Post-Communist Politics, Princeton University (2024–present).

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

---

REFERENCES

**Mark Beissinger**  
**Grigo Pop-Eleches**  
**Elizabeth Nugent**

 [mbeissin@princeton.edu](mailto:mbeissin@princeton.edu)  
 [gpop@princeton.edu](mailto:gpop@princeton.edu)  
 [enugent@princeton.edu](mailto:enugent@princeton.edu)

updated May 30, 2026