Isabelle DeSisto

CONTACT

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Substantive: political violence; contentious politics; public opinion; Eastern Europe & Central Asia.
Methodological: public opinion surveys, experimental methods, quantitative text analysis, geographic information systems (GIS), qualitative interviews, archival research.

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 & 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 (2020), *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)

PEER-REVIEWED PAPERS

"The Threshold Effect: Separating Preference Falsification From Weak Preferences in Russian War Support." With Grigore Pop-Eleches & Jacob Tucker. *British Journal of Political Science*, 2026. [Online appendix] [Replication files]

"The Effects of Decentralization on Local Governance: Evidence From Ukraine." With Grigore Pop-Eleches & Graeme Robertson. *Comparative Political Studies*, 2026. [Online appendix] [Replication files]

"Socioeconomic Development and the Uneven Legacies of Authoritarian Repression." *Journal of Historical Political Economy*, 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

"Source Credibility and Persuasion Under Autocracy." With Laura Howells, Grigore Pop-Eleches, & Jacob Tucker. *R&R, Journal of Politics.*

"Revolution and Deforestation: A Global Panel Analysis." With Camille DeSisto. *R&R, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).*

"How Exile Escalates Revolution." With Elizabeth Nugent. *R&R, Perspectives on Politics.*

"Past Repression, Present Solidarity: Mnemonic Opportunities in Wartime." *Job Market Paper.*
Winner of Doctoral Award in Ukraine and Central Europe section, ASN Convention 2026

"Explaining Solidarity with Foreign War Victims: Empathy versus Threat." With Felix Beilin, Laura Howells, Grigore Pop-Eleches, & Jacob Tucker.

"Family Repression and Political Mobilization Across Regime Types."

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

Other Publications

"Endorsements and Incumbency in Moldova's 2020 and 2024 Elections." *Moldovan Analytical Digest*, Jan. 2025. With Grigore Pop-Eleches.

"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.)

Fellowships & Grants

Collaborative

2022–2026. *Russia Watcher* project (PI: Grigore Pop-Eleches). ~$550,000 total:
- National Science Foundation (2023–2026). $414,688.
- Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. $75,000.
- Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination (Princeton). $50,000.
- Data-Driven Social Science Initiative (Princeton). $11,000.

2025. Institute for Humane Studies. $5,000. With Frances Cayton.
2022. Data-Driven Social Science Initiative small grant (Princeton). $4,550. With Jacob Tucker.

Individual

2026–Present. Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies Graduate Fellowship.
2021–2026. Centennial Fellowship (Princeton). Full tuition & stipend above standard rate.
2026. Ukraine on Campus Travel Stipend (Razom for Ukraine).
2025–2026. Dean's Fund for Scholarly Travel (Princeton). $1,400 total.
2024–2026. Stafford Funding for Conference Travel (Princeton). $4,200 total.
2025. P.E.O. Scholar Award. National merit-based award for women in doctoral programs. $25,000.
2025. Estophilus Scholarship from Republic of Estonia Education and Youth Board. €2,140.
2025. American Councils Title VIII Research Scholar grant. ~$10,000. *Suspended by Trump admin.*
2025. Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. $4,000.
2022–2025. Bobst Center Graduate Dissertation Grants (Princeton). $12,000 total.
2024. Multi-Center Graduate Dissertation Grant (Princeton). $15,000.
2022–2024. Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. $10,300 total.
2023. Estonian government scholarship for language study. €825.
2023. Workshop on Post-Communist Politics grant (Bobst Center, Princeton). $3,000.
2022. Politics Dept. & Program in Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies (Princeton). $1,300.
2020–2021. Eben Fiske Studentship (Trinity College, Cambridge). Full tuition & living stipend.
2020. Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute Scholarship (Harvard). $6,680.
2019. David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Grant (Harvard). $3,000.
2019. Government Department Chair's Research and Travel Fellowship (Harvard). $2,750.
2018. Weissman International Internship Program Grant (Harvard). $5,500.
2017–2019. Goldman Undergraduate Research Grant (Harvard). $6,500 total.

Awards

2026. Doctoral Award in Ukraine and Central Europe section, ASN Convention 2026.
2026. Elmer Adler Book Collecting Prize (Princeton).

2024. McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning (Princeton). Exemplar Mentor Award.
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 (Harvard). For the best undergrad thesis on Spanish-speaking Latin America.
2020. Crosby Prize (Harvard). For "excellence" in the 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 Government.
2019. Phi Beta Kappa, Junior 24 (Harvard). First induction into PBK; elected Marshal.
2017–2018. John Harvard Scholar (Harvard). Top 5% of the class.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Conferences *upcoming

American Political Science Assoc. Annual Meeting (2026, 2025, 2024, 2023)
Assoc. for the Study of Nationalities Convention (2026, 2025, 2024, 2023)
Assoc. for Slavic, East European, & Eurasian Studies Convention (2026*, 2024, 2023, 2021, 2020)
Midwest Political Science Assoc. Conference (2026, 2025, 2024, 2021)
Southern Political Science Assoc. Conference (2026, 2025)
Bridges in the Baltics Conference (2025)
Council for European Studies Conference (2021)
Assoc. for the Study of the Cuban Economy Conference (2020)
Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Studies Conference, Indiana Univ. (2020)

Selected workshops & invited lectures

2026: Northeast Regional Workshop in European Politics (Princeton); Harvard Political Violence Workshop; Popular Support for Autocratic Regimes in Historical Perspective (Toulouse School of Economics); Ukraine in the World Conference (Ukrainian Catholic Univ.); Shevchenko Workshop in Ukrainian Studies (Univ. of Michigan); Danyliw Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine (Univ. of Ottawa)
2025: Skytte Institute, University of Tartu (Estonia); Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan)
2024: Graduate Conference on Central Asia (Harvard)
2023: Authoritarian Propaganda and Media Control (Columbia)

TEACHING

Graduate Teaching Fellow, McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning (2026–present)
Lead teaching assistant orientation; conduct classroom observations; facilitate pedagogy training.

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: Grigore Pop-Eleches & Nadia Crisan

POL300: "Conducting Independent Research in Political Science" (Fall 2024)
Primary instructor: Jonathan Kastellec
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

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

Interviews & Media

"Ce s-ar întâmpla dacă Putin nu ar mai conduce Rusia. Răspunsul unui politolog de la Princeton." *Adevărul.ro*, 21 June 2026.
"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," ASEEES 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.

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 𝕏 @russia_watcher 🦋 russiawatcher.bsky.social
With Grigore Pop-Eleches, Laura Howells, & Jacob Tucker
Daily tracking survey of Russian public opinion
Funded by NSF and numerous Princeton sources
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 *Comparative Political Studies*, *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Nationalities Papers*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, and *Cahiers des Amériques latines*.

REFERENCES

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Grigore Pop-Eleches gpop@princeton.edu
Elizabeth Nugent enugent@princeton.edu

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