

Fall of communism in eastern europe, 1989

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



On the night of November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall—the most potent symbol of the cold-war division of Europe—came down. Earlier that day, the Communist authorities of the German Democratic Republic had announced the removal of travel restrictions to democratic West Berlin. Thousands of East Germans streamed into the West, and in the course of the night, celebrants on both sides of the wall began to tear it down. The collapse of the Berlin Wall was the culminating point of the revolutionary changes sweeping East Central Europe in 1989. Throughout the Soviet bloc, reformers assumed power and ended over 40 years of dictatorial Communist rule. The reform movement that ended communism in East Central Europe began in Poland. Solidarity, an anti-Communist trade union and social movement, had forced Poland's Communist government to recognize it in 1980 through a wave of strikes that gained international attention. In 1981, Poland's Communist authorities, under pressure from Moscow, declared martial law, arrested Solidarity's leaders, and banned the democratic trade union. The ban did not bring an end to Solidarity. The movement simply went underground, and the rebellious Poles organized their own civil society, separate from the Communist government and its edicts. In 1985, the assumption of power in the Soviet Union by a reformer, Mikhail Gorbachev, paved the way for political and economic reforms in East Central Europe. Gorbachev abandoned the " Brezhnev Doctrine" – the Soviet Union's policy of intervening with military force, if necessary, to preserve Communist rule in the region. Instead, he encouraged the local Communist leaders to seek new ways of gaining popular support for their rule. In Hungary, the Communist government initiated reforms in 1989 that led to the sanctioning of a

multipart system and competitive elections. In Poland, the Communists entered into round-table talks with a reinvigorated Solidarity. As a result, Poland held its first competitive elections since before World War II, and in 1989, Solidarity formed the first non-Communist government within the Soviet bloc since 1948. Inspired by their neighbors' reforms, East Germans took to the streets in the summer and fall of 1989 to call for reforms, including freedom to visit West Berlin and West Germany. Moscow's refusal to use military force to buoy the regime of East German leader Erich Honecker led to his replacement and the initiation of political reforms, leading up to the fateful decision to open the border crossings on the night of November 9, 1989. In the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Czechs and Slovaks took to the streets to demand political reforms in Czechoslovakia. Leading the demonstrations in Prague was dissident playwright Vaclav Havel, co-founder of the reform group Charter 77. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia quietly and peacefully transferred rule to Havel and the Czechoslovak reformers in what was later dubbed the "Velvet Revolution." In Romania, the Communist regime of hardliner Nicolae Ceausescu was overthrown by popular protest and force of arms in December 1989. Soon, the Communist parties of Bulgaria and Albania also ceded power. The revolutions of 1989 marked the death knell of communism in Europe. As a result, not only was Germany reunified in 1990, but soon, revolution spread to the Soviet Union itself. After surviving a hard line coup attempt in 1991, Gorbachev was forced to cede power in Russia to Boris Yeltsin, who oversaw the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The collapse of communism in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union marked the end of the cold war. The U.

S. long-term policy of containing Soviet expansion while encouraging democratic reform in Central and Eastern Europe through scientific and cultural exchanges, information policy (e. g., Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty), and the United States' own example, provided invaluable support to the peoples of East Central Europe in their struggle for freedom.