



Watching the Watchers

Throughout history, dictators have constructed secret police agencies to neutralize rivals and enforce social order. But the same agencies can become disloyal and threatening. This book explores how six communist regimes in Cold War Europe confronted this dilemma. The divergent strategies they followed caused differences in regimes of repression, with consequences for social order and political stability. Surviving the shock of Josef Stalin's death in 1953, elites in East Germany and Romania retained control over the secret police. They grew their coercive institutions to effectively suppress dissent via surveillance and targeted repression. In Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, ruling coalitions were thrown into turmoil after Stalin's death. Their leaders were replaced and they lost control of the security apparatus. Post-Stalinist transitions led elites to restrict the capacity of the secret police and risk social disorder. Using original empirical analysis that is both rigorous and rich in fascinating detail, Henry Thomson brings new insights into the darkest corners of authoritarian politics.

HENRY THOMSON is Associate Professor in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University. He has won fellowships and prizes from the American Political Science Association, Nuffield College, and Australian National University. He is the author of *Food and Power: Regime Type, Agricultural Policy and Political Stability* (2019).

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Communist Elites, the Secret Police
and Social Order in Cold War Europe

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For my father, Roderick Thomas Thomson.

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