Introduction to The Post-Communist World (1988-Present)

During the Cold War, the Communist governments of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe tightly restricted freedom of expression, association, and movement by their citizens. Changes stirred in 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev (1931-) assumed leadership of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's political and economic reforms unleashed pent-up demands for freedom that proved impossible to contain.

In 1989 citizens' movements across Eastern Europe swept the Communists from power. Poland, whose Solidarity labor union had defied the authorities, elected a non-Communist parliament. Massive protests brought down the Czechoslovakian and Romanian governments. On November 9, 1989, East Germany's embattled leadership allowed transit into West Berlin across the border marked by the Berlin Wall, which had divided the city and symbolized Communist tyranny, and jubilant citizens tore down the wall. A year later, Germany itself was reunited under democratic rule. By 1991 the Soviet Union's constituent republics were breaking away. Russia declared its sovereignty, and its new president, Boris Yeltsin (1931-2007), took control of the Soviet state apparatus. Gorbachev resigned on December 25, 1991, marking the end of the Soviet Union.

"Introduction to The Post-Communist World (1988-Present)." *Gale Encyclopedia of World History*: *Governments*, Gale, 2009. *Gale In Context: Middle School.*

1. According to the paragraphs above, what actions characterized Communist governments during the Cold War?

2. In Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone" (an article we will be reading over the new several days), he refers to "post-Communist countries" trying to emulate democratic nations, particularly the United States, as they established new governments. To what "post-Communist" countries could he be referring?

3. What are some examples of ways previously Communist countries began to shift toward establishing more democratic governments?