

Regime Change: Democratization and Democratic Backsliding

Update:

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the course will be taught online. The Zoom link is coming soon. For the same reasons, the online evaluation is available through [this](#) link.

This course seeks to shed light on some of the fundamental questions occupying the minds of political scientists around the world. Why are some countries democracies while others are not? How do dictatorships work? What undermines autocratic rule? Which countries are ready for democracy? Why do some countries hold competitive elections, but remain autocratic? How can we then distinguish between democracy and dictatorship? Finally, what is democratic backsliding and why does it happen?

Despite the seeming consensus among politicians and intellectuals that democracy is the 'least bad' political regime and despite the fact that almost all countries in the world have the facade of democratic institutions, more than half of humanity still lives under the autocratic rule. The reason is the enormous difficulty of getting rid of autocracy, whereas maintaining a young, fragile democracy is no less challenging. Only a third of all the countries that have attempted to democratize since 1974 actually became democratic.

Autocracies are also heterogenous: non-democratic societies vary among each other more than democracies do. Politics and policies in these regimes range from complete deinstitutionalization and despotism to having a strong bureaucracy and clear rules of the game. Democratization attempts there face different tasks to be solved and the chances of success also vary dramatically. In addition, more and more stable democracies reveal the threatening tendency of democratic backsliding. Although this used to be relatively rare in the past, the trend became increasingly widespread in the last 20 years.

Course Design

This course is designed for the students with a solid background in social and political sciences but with little or no knowledge of the topic of regime changes. It can be considered a crash-course into the study of democratization and democratic backsliding.

The course consists of four days and 15 90-minutes teaching sessions. The first part is a series of interactive seminars based on and covering the existing literature. We address the major questions of regime change and try to understand how autocratic regimes work and what choices dictators face in times of political crisis. Students familiarize themselves with and analyze the most influential classifications of non-democratic regimes, including the current debates on hybrid regimes and the way the existing regimes affect the pathways towards democracy. Furthermore, we investigate the influence of structure, agency, and foreign influence on a country's political regime and chances to democratize. Then we discuss the problems of the last 20 years: democratic backsliding with its uncertain origins and hybrid regimes, which have seemingly democratic institutions but yet exhibit authoritarian practices.

The last day is largely devoted to student presentations, for which students are asked to apply the theories studied to a chosen country case. The presentations are followed by a wrap-up session in the last class.

Learning Outcomes

After taking this course, students shall be able to:

- understand and distinguish between ideal types of political regimes, especially dictatorial ones;
- apply their knowledge of different political regimes on empirical cases;
- critically engage with the literature on democratization and democratic backsliding;
- analyze real-world events with the toolkit of the regime change studies;
- estimate a country's perspective of democratization/democratic backsliding.

Activities and Evaluation

Reading the texts presented in the syllabus is crucial for having a fruitful and interesting discussion in class. Therefore, it is necessary for every student to do the readings. That is why every student will have to send a one-page text that summarizes the readings assigned for the class: it can be a long text about one reading, or a short summary of every reading. The deadline is until midnight before each of the first three days. Having sent these three texts is necessary for achieving credits.

Each student will have to deliver a 20-minute presentation on a chosen case of democratization or democratic backsliding, followed by class discussion. To prevent the presentation from becoming a mere recitation of the past events, students should put the main focus on analyzing the connection between the events and the existing theories. In order to facilitate that, every student will be asked to use a specific guideline of advice and questions. A presentation should answer the questions such as:

- Who were the main actors and organizations involved in the regime change?
- Which kind of autocracy is the initial regime? (In case the initial regime is democracy – what were the (possible) institutional gaps that allowed for the democratic backsliding?)
- What is the mode of regime change according to the theories presented in class?
- What is the country's level of development?
- Which branches of theories does the case support or contradict and why?

Every presentation will be followed by a 30-minute class discussion. After the discussion, each student will receive written feedback by e-mail from the instructor. For presentation and attendance, students get 2 ECTS.

In addition, it is possible to write a term paper for this class that covers any democratization or democratic backslide after the WWII from a theoretical perspective. In this case, a student gets 6 ECTS.

Readings

The required readings are available through the University's e-learning platform in advance of the seminar. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the content of the readings. Each lesson will have 1-2 readings introducing the topic of approximately 20 pages size.

Topics, Literature and Schedule

Day 1. Saturday 9-15. Zoom meeting on 20.06.20. 4 90-minute classes: 09:00 – 10:30; 11:00 – 12:30; 13:30 – 15:00; 15:30 – 17:00.

1. Patterns of democracy and autocracy.
Linz, J. J., Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*. JHU Press. Chapter 3 (pp 38-55).
Geddes, B., Wright, J., Wright, J. G., & Frantz, E. (2018). *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. Cambridge University Press. Introduction (pp 1-17)
2. Regime change: Modernization theory – people and inequality, social classes and resource curse.

Boix, C. (2011). Democracy, development, and the international system. *American Political Science Review*, 105(4), 809-828.

3. Regime change: Voluntaristic approach.

O'Donnell, G., & Schmitter, P. C. (2013). *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*. JHU Press. Required: Introduction; Chapter 4 (37-47).

Coppedge, M. (2012). *Democratization and research methods*. Cambridge University Press. Optional: Chapter 7, pp 158-192.

Day 2. Sunday 9-15 Zoom meeting on 21.06.20. 4 90-minute classes: 09:00 – 10:30; 11:00 – 12:30; 13:30 – 15:00; 15:30 – 17:00.

4. Regime change: Foreign influence.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press. Required: introduction, pp 3-30.

5. Hybrid regimes: Wolves in sheep's clothing.

Ibid.

6. Autocratic politics: Selectorate, winning coalition, inequality and regime stability.

Wintrobe, R. (2000). *The political economy of dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press. Required: Chapter 2, pp 20-39.

De Mesquita, B. B., & Smith, A. (2011). *The dictator's handbook: why bad behavior is almost always good politics*. PublicAffairs. Required: Introduction.

Day 3. Saturday 9-15 Zoom meeting on 27.06.20. 4 90-minute classes: 09:00 – 10:30; 11:00 – 12:30; 13:30 – 15:00; 15:30 – 17:00.

7. Democratic backsliding: Origins and causes.

Fukuyama, F. (2015). Why is democracy performing so poorly? *Journal of Democracy*, 26(1), 11-20.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. (2015). The myth of democratic recession. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(1), 45-58.

Selçuk, O. (2016). Strong presidents and weak institutions: populism in Turkey, Venezuela and Ecuador. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 571-589.

Bermeo, N. (2016). On democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5-19.

Day 4. Sunday 9-15 Zoom meeting on 28.06.20

Student presentations and discussions.

Wrap-Up session.