

Political regimes: the end of democratisation?

Course convenor: Dr Pieter van Houten

Seminar times: Lent term, Tuesdays 12-2pm

How are states (the main 'units' of politics in recent centuries) governed, and what determines whether they are democratic or autocratic, or something in between? How do we account for movements from authoritarian to democratic regimes (or the other way around)? What factors influence the stability of democratic regimes? What explains the alleged 'democratic backsliding' in various countries in recent years? These questions are both among the perennial questions addressed in the study of comparative politics and of crucial importance in contemporary political debates.

This module focuses on how these questions have been addressed in the comparative politics literature. While there will be some focus on older ('classical') work, the main emphasis will be on recent contributions. There is a very large literature on political regimes, and this module can only focus on a small part of it. However, the topics and readings have been chosen to provide students with a good sense of contemporary contributions to the study of political regimes, and of the theoretical, methodological and geographical breadth of this field of study. The module will give students a good basis to study or research specific aspects of political regimes (in the module essay, other MPhil modules, the MPhil dissertation, or future study/research). In addition, it will help students to develop a deeper appreciation of the more general field of comparative politics and some of its main approaches and methods.

The first two seminars of the module focus on aspects and explanations of the process of democratisation, which has traditionally been the main focus of the study of political regime dynamics. As it has become clearer, however, that authoritarian states are not inevitably disappearing and may be strengthening, while existing democracies may be 'backsliding', the focus of the literature on political regimes has shifted (some of) its focus to these issues. This is reflected in the following four seminars of this module, which focus on the dynamics of authoritarian and 'hybrid' regimes, and the apparent 'democratic backsliding' of consolidated democracies. The final seminar considers the possible future(s) of political regimes.

Teaching Format

This module will be taught in the form of seminars organised around the critical discussion and analysis of assigned readings. Students are expected to actively participate in these seminars, and some seminars may have smaller group discussions and exercises. Depending on the number of students taking the module and the seminar dynamics, students may be asked to prepare a short presentation. The discussions will focus on both theoretical and empirical issues.

The current plan – in light of the Covid-related situation and guidelines – is that the seminars will be taught online via Zoom. (If the situation and guidelines change during the academic year, this arrangement may be reconsidered.) Students should, therefore, make sure that they are familiar with the Zoom platform and attempt to be in a place with reliable internet connection when attending the seminars. The details for the Zoom sessions will be provided closer to the start of the module.

Assessment

Students who want to make this module part of their assessed course work are required to submit a 3,000-word essay, on a question taken from a provided list. For dates and the deadline for the provision of essay titles and the submission of the essays, see the general MPhil course handbook.

Note that students attending the module but not doing the formal assessment are expected to do the required readings and participate in the seminar discussions in the same way as the other students.

Course Structure and Background Reading

The entries below indicate the specific topics and required readings for each seminar. **Students are required to do these readings before the seminar.** All listed articles are available online (when connected to the university network) and many of the used books are available as e-books through Cambridge's library catalogue. The Politics Library (part of the Seeley Library) and the University Library will have some hard copies of the books. An attempt will be made to make less accessible some readings available through the module's Moodle site.

Before the start of the module, 'possible further reading' for each seminar will be added to this module guide. There is no expectation to read any of this before a seminar (although you, of course, can if you are interested), but these may be useful for the essay assignment or future study. More generally, the following journals focus specifically on the themes covered in this module and are worth browsing if looking for further materials on these themes: *Journal of Democracy*, *Democratization*, and *Representation*.

Background reading

If students want to do some background and preparatory reading for this module, the following books are recommended (these books are written for a broader audience, so their styles and approaches may differ from many of the required readings in the course, but they give good indications of the themes and questions covered in the course):

Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies throughout the World* (Henry Holt, 2008).

Erica Frantz, *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs To Know* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals about Our Future* (Penguin, 2018).

This is a graduate-level module (not an introductory course) in the comparative politics of political regimes. It is certainly open to students who have not taken courses on political regimes or comparative politics more broadly before, but these students may want to consider consulting a general comparative politics textbook before or during the course. There are many such textbooks; a good one is Rod Hague, Martin Harrop and John McCormick, *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction*, 10th ed. (published in North America as *Political Science: A Comparative Introduction*, 8th ed.) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) [or earlier editions by Hague & Harrop].

Seminars and Reading Lists

Seminar 1: Political regimes – questions, concepts and ‘classical’ approaches to the study of democratisation (26th Jan)

What are some of the main questions that the literature on political regimes (that is, on issues related to democratisation and to authoritarian and hybrid systems of government) tries to answer? To set the agenda for the rest of the module, one part of this seminar will focus on this. Until relatively recently, the main focus in the comparative politics literature on regime dynamics has clearly been on democratisation, which has generated an enormous literature. The second part of the seminar will focus on conceptualisations of ‘democracy’ and ‘democratisation’ (including their ‘Western-centric’ nature), and at some of the ‘classical’ comparative works on democratisation.

Required readings:

Larry Diamond, ‘Facing Up to the Democratic Recession’, *Journal of Democracy* 26, 1 (2015): 141-155.

Adam Przeworski, *Crises of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), Chapter 9 (‘How Democracy Works’, pp. 192-206).

Richard Youngs, ‘Exploring “Non-Western Democracy”’, *Journal of Democracy* 26, 4 (2015): 140-154.

For this session, you are expected to read one of the following ‘classical’ works focused on explanations for democratisation (and regime type outcomes more broadly):

- Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 413-52). [Focuses on the role of social classes and groups and the conditions under which they support certain regime types]
- Seymour Martin Lipset, ‘Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy’, *American Political Science Review* 53, 1 (1959): 69-105. [Focuses on economic and social conditions, and is an example of ‘modernisation theory’]
- Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), Chapters 2-4 (pp. 6-47). [Focuses on the role of human agency and political strategies]

You can pick whichever of these seems most interesting to you.

After reading one of these ‘classical’ works, you should look at this chapter (which gives a concise overview of the different theoretical approaches represented or initiated by these works):

- Jean Grugel and Matthew L. Bishop, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Chapter 3 (‘Explaining Democratization’, pp. 74-104).

Seminar 2: Democratisation – examples of more recent work (2nd Feb)

Even though emphasis has partly shifted to the study of authoritarian regimes and democratic backsliding (see the remaining seminars of this module), there is still a vibrant literature on the causes and dynamics of democratisation. This seminar gives some flavour of more recent work on these issues. This will demonstrate that the factors highlighted by the ‘classical’ works in session 1 – coalition of social groups, economic factors (with a particularly strong focus on the role of inequality) and political agency – continue to be seen as important, and that attempts have been made to combine these factors in accounts of democratisation. One broader question to consider

here is: what do we think of the attempt and ambition to develop general theories of the development of democracies and dictatorships?

Required readings:

Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, 'Inequality and Regime Change: Democratic Transitions and the Stability of Democratic Rule', *American Political Science Review* 106, 3 (2012): 495-516.

Scott Mainwaring and Anibal Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival and Fall* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), Chapter 6 (on El Salvador).

David J. Samuels and Henry Thomson, 'Lord, Peasant ... and Tractor: Agricultural Modernization, Moore's Thesis, and the Emergence of Democracy', *Perspectives on Politics*, forthcoming (available online)

Rachel Beatty Riedl, Dan Slater, Joseph Wong and Daniel Ziblatt, 'Authoritarian-Led Democratization', *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (2020): 315-332.

Seminar 3: Authoritarian regimes (I) – characteristics and factors influencing stability (9th Feb)

As indicated above, until relatively recently the majority of the literature on regime dynamics focused on democratisation. Much of this literature (implicitly or explicitly) assumes that most countries exhibit a general development towards more democratic regimes. However, authoritarian states still exist (and may be growing in number and strength again) and many of them appear to be relatively stable. This has generated more attention in comparative politics to the workings of authoritarian regimes and the factors and strategies that sustain them. This seminar looks at some of this work.

Required readings:

Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), Chapter 5 ('Dictatorial survival strategies in challenging conditions: factionalized armed supporters and party creation', pp. 95-126). [It is also worth looking at the Introduction of this book as further background reading.]

Wonjun Song and Joseph Wright, 'The North Korean Autocracy in Comparative Perspective', *Journal of East Asian Studies* 18 (2018): 157-180.

Nicolas van de Walle, 'Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss? The Evolution of Political Clientelism in Africa', in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (eds), *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) (pp. 50-67).

Seraphine F. Maerz, 'The Many Faces of Authoritarian Persistence: A Set-Theory Perspective on the Survival Strategies of Authoritarian Regimes', *Government and Opposition* 55, 1 (2020): 64-87.

Seminar 4: Authoritarian regimes (II) – old and new forms of repression (16th Feb)

Despite the wide variety in and evolving nature of authoritarian regimes, 'repression' remains a key factor in the functioning and stability of these regimes. However, repression can take various forms, ranging from direct

employment of security forces to complex and subtle forms of digital surveillance. This seminar focuses on variation in forms of repression and the factors that facilitate them, while keeping in mind that repression is by no means the only strategy used by authoritarian regimes to maintain their rule (see seminar 3).

Required readings:

Eva Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism: Lessons of the Arab Spring', *Comparative Politics* 44, 2 (2012): 127-149.

Oisín Tansey, *The International Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Chapter 5 ('Underwriting Repression: The International Politics of Coercive Crackdowns', pp. 122-150).

Jody LaPorte, 'Foreign versus Domestic Bribery: Explaining Repression in Kleptocratic Regimes', *Comparative Politics* 50, 1 (2017): 83-102.

Gary King, Jennifer Pan and Margaret E. Roberts, 'How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument', *American Political Science Review* 111, 3 (2017): 484-501.

Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Erica Frantz and Joseph Wright, 'The Digital Dictators: How Technology Strengthens Autocracy', *Foreign Affairs* 99, 2 (March/April 2020): 103-115.

Seminar 5: Hybrid regimes – an increasingly prominent phenomenon? (23rd Feb)

It is clear that the political systems of some states combine democratic and autocratic features. This has given rise to a focus on 'hybrid' states. How should we conceptualise and think about such states? Are they simply temporary arrangements (and if so, what determines whether they move towards 'fuller' democracy or autocracy), or can they be stable over longer periods of time? And what are the consequences of having a 'hybrid' political regime? This seminar focuses on these questions, with cases taken from different parts of the world.

Required readings:

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapters 1 and 2, and read/browse one of the empirical chapters of your choice (chapters 3-7).

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, 'The New Competitive Authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy* 31, 1 (2020): 51-65.

Cole J. Harvey and Paula Mukherjee, 'Methods of Electoral Manipulation and the Likelihood of Post-Election Protest', *Government and Opposition*, forthcoming (available online).

Andrea Cassani, 'Do All Bad Things Go Together? Electoral Authoritarianism and the Consequences of Political Change Short of Democratisation', *Politikon* 44, 3 (2017): 351-369.

Seminar 6: Crisis of consolidated democracies? (2nd March)

As is obvious from public discussions in recent years, concerns about the prospects of existing democracies have grown. Are existing (including long-standing and presumed to be consolidated) democracies in crisis, or even in danger of breaking down? If so, what are the reasons for this? And to what extent can our existing knowledge

and understanding of regime dynamics in the past help us to address these questions? In this seminar we look at some recent literature that have started to investigate these questions. It is noteworthy that much of this rather new and rapidly developing literature (including some of the readings below) is aimed at broader audiences than some of the purer academic literature used in the previous seminars.

Required readings:

Adam Przeworski, *Crises of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), Part II ('The Present: What is Happening?', pp. 81-142).

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals about Our Future* (Penguin, 2018), Introduction (pp. 1-10), Chapter 1 ('Fateful Alliances', pp. 11-32) and Chapter 4 ('Subverting Democracy', pp. 72-96).

R.S. Foa, A. Klassen, M. Slade, A. Rand and R. Collins, 'The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020', Centre for the Future of Democracy, University of Cambridge (https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/DemocracyReport2020_nYqqWi0.pdf)

Elisabeth Bakke and Nick Sitter, 'The EU's Enfants Terribles: Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe since 2010', *Perspectives on Politics*, forthcoming (available online, 2020)

Helen Margetts, 'Rethinking Democracy with Social Media', *Political Quarterly* 90, S1 (2018): 107-123.

Christopher Walker, Shanthi Kalathil and Jessica Ludwig, 'The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power', *Journal of Democracy* 31, 1 (2020): 124-137.

Seminar 7: Political regimes – future scenarios? (9th March)

In light of the alleged crisis of existing, consolidated democracies and the seemingly stronger role and position of authoritarian regimes across the world, what are the possible future dynamics of political regimes? A continuation of alternating 'waves' of democratisation and autocratisation? A proliferation of hybrid regimes? Or political regimes that don't fit our existing conceptions and will require a fundamental rethinking of these conceptions? These questions are inherently speculative, and this is reflected in the readings for this seminar. In the discussion, we will explore the extent to which the concepts, theories and arguments covered in the module can shed light on these questions.

Required readings:

Adam Przeworski, *Crises of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), Ch 11 ('What Can and Cannot Happen?', pp. 192-206).

Dan Slater, 'After Democracy: What Happens When Freedom Erodes', *Foreign Affairs* (Nov 6, 2018).

Carl Gershman, 'The Instinct for Freedom', *Journal of Democracy* 31, 1 (2020): 103-113.

Donatella della Porta and Andrea Felicetti, 'Innovating Democracy Against Democratic Stress in Europe: Social Movements and Democratic Experiments', *Representation*, forthcoming (available online, 2019).

Su Yun Woo and Daniel Kübler, 'Taking Stock of Democratic Innovations and Their Emergence in (unlikely) Authoritarian Contexts', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 61, 2 (2020): 335-355.

David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends* (Profile Books, 2018), Ch 4 ('Something Better?', pp. 165-206).