Democratic Regressions: Patterns and Causes

Most surges in democratization have been followed by democratic regressions, potentially culminating in the outright establishment of autocracy. This happened after World War I, after World War II, and, according to recent accounts, we have entered another such period since the mid-2000s (Puddington 2008; but see also Merkel 2010; Møller/Skaaning 2013). But exactly what are democratic regressions and where and when have we witnessed them? Are these regressions characterized by systematic patterns in the sequencing of violations of democratic attributes? And why are some countries more prone to democratic regression than others?

This workshop serves as a forum for addressing these questions. More particularly, we invite papers representing 1) theoretical frameworks that attempt to combine explanatory factors of democratic regression; 2) comparative studies that focus on different periods where democracy has been on the defensive, such as the interwar period and the contemporary global economic crisis; 3) conceptual and or/explanatory work based on a multifaceted and disaggregate view of democracy – and thus of democratic regression.

Regarding the third point, while most extant studies impose a uniform, and often binary, definition of democracy that is generally focused on the electoral dimension (e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson 2005; Berg-Schlosser & Mitchell 2003; Boix 2003; Teorell 2010), an important contribution of the workshop is to take a multifaceted view of democratic regressions. We thus make a call for the identification of syndromes and sequences of de-democratization – that is, aspects of democracy that tend follow one another when a regime slips away from the democratic ideal.

The workshop writes into a number of ongoing scholarly debates in democratization studies:

- The historical turn (Capoccia/Ziblatt 2010): Studies of historical cases are both intriguing in themselves but also provide analytical leverage which aids our general understanding of contemporary democratic developments by allowing systematical comparisons, analysis of causal processes, and assessing the importance of critical junctures.
- The conceptualization and measurement of democracy (Coppedge/Gerring 2011): A key insight here is that our conclusions depend on the concepts and measures we use, say, the choice between a minimalist and a maximalist definition of democracy. Furthermore, a disaggregated view of democracy is necessary to lay bare sequences of democratization and de-democratization (Ziblatt, 2006).
- The combination of explanatory conditions (Bernhard et al. 2001; Ertman 1998; Levitsky/Way 2010; Boix 2011): To understand democratic regressions, an appreciation of complex causality is often required because a number of causes combine – and interact – to produce regime change. Hence, mono-causal analyses often miss the mark (Hall, 2003).

Regarding participants, the workshop will be open to junior scholars and senior scholars with novel takes (theoretically and/or empirically) on the workshops agenda.
References:


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