

Political Regimes: Accessing and Exercising Power

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Class hours: M-F, 8:30-11:20am
Location: Page-Robinson Hall, Room 401
Office hours: M-W-Th, 1-3pm
Location: Rock Library (1st floor). Sign-up [here](#)

Synopsis

As democracy is eroding worldwide, it becomes essential to study its foundations and discern between what democracy is... and what it is not. This is a one-week introductory course on political regimes, also known as the formal and informal rules of access and exercise of political power. We will cover democracies and non-democratic alternatives (totalitarianism and authoritarianism), democratization processes, hybrid regimes, and current challenges to democratic rule.

Course Description

All over the world, we have been experiencing a wave of democratic erosion since the mid-2000s. This means that fewer countries are meeting the basic qualities of democratic governance. Typical examples of this phenomenon include Viktor Orban's hegemony in Hungary since 2010, the rise of Trump in the US in 2015, Narendra Modi's Hindu Nationalist government in India, and Brazil's Bolsonaro (2019-2022). In this context, studying political regimes becomes paramount, as changes in how rulers access power positions and make decisions in office affect the lives of millions of citizens.

This course offers a first approach to thinking about political regimes' essentials. Through our class discussions written assignments, and oral presentations, we will not only distinguish democracy from other types of regimes but will also differentiate between multiple non-democratic alternatives. First, we will study the historical trajectory of democratic regimes, starting in Ancient Greek and ending in contemporary modern states. After developing a solid understanding of democracy, we will dive into the specifics of totalitarian (e.g., Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union) and authoritarian regimes (e.g., Franco's Spain or Latin American military dictatorships), two classic non-democratic alternatives. Then, we will explore the logic behind democratization processes, followed by the world of hybrid regimes, that is, political regimes that share characteristics both from democracy and non-democracies. Finally, we will reflect on the current threats on democracy by studying backsliding processes. As we advance the course topics, we will refer in parallel to multiple historical examples and analyze recent cases in-depth to combine abstract theoretical notions with more concrete, first-hand empirical evidence.

In addition to developing students' views on these topics, this course will focus on enhancing skills they will need to continue their undergraduate journey: reading critically, consistently participating in class, writing cohesively, and preparing oral presentations (see more

information in the Assignments section). Hopefully, they will apply such skills in other courses on comparative politics, international relations, and beyond.

Learning Goals

- Develop critical thinking about democracy's origins, evolution over time, inner workings, and positives and negatives.
- Form and articulate views about non-democratic alternatives, democratic backsliding processes, and democracy's current threats.
- Lay a strong foundation for future work in comparative politics, international relations, and related disciplines.
- Develop reading, oral, writing, and teamwork skills.

Assignments

Class Participation (20%):

Participation is an expected and vital component of this course. For that reason, students should attend and actively participate in class sessions. To receive full marks on participation, students are expected to attend *on time* to *all* sessions and contribute to the class discussions and activities. Reading is critical for an informed participation, and attendance will be taken at the beginning of every session.

Reaction Posts (20%):

Monday-Thursday, students should post in a forum on Canvas a comment/question about the readings. This way, students are expected to post four reactions (5% of the grade each) throughout the course. Students' responses have a limit of 150 words—they are short. Your comment/question should demonstrate a careful reading of the materials and highlight aspects of the texts you found exciting or worth "fleshing out" in class. You should post your reaction to the readings before 7pm. More specifics will be provided in class.

Written Reflection (25%):

Students will write a brief reflection about the course materials (readings, videos, class discussions, etc.) by Friday, the last day of class. Written reflections are *not* summaries of the readings. While the reaction posts are specific comments/questions about the readings for one class, the written reflections are more general appreciations of all the course contents. In your reflections, you should demonstrate your critical thinking by putting the materials in conversation and developing your own ideas, summarizing the key takeaways from the course, and flagging questions you still have. The word limit is 750 words. Make sure to submit your written reflections by Friday, 7pm.

Oral Presentations (25%):

On the last day of class, you will present your written reflections to your peers. Your presentation should not be longer than five minutes. Make sure to summarize your main takeaways from the course, present your main ideas or reflections, explain the connections you found between the

texts, and ask any questions about the class materials to your peers. You do *not* need to create slides—just go for it.

Office Hours Attendance (10%):

During the course, students are expected to come at least once to office hours to talk about any aspect of the course (the assignments, the readings, etc.). Just by coming, you earn 10% of your total grade, don't miss this opportunity!

Course Policies

Course Completion

To receive a Certificate of Completion, students must earn a minimum of 70% of the total grade.

Readings

All readings are posted on the Canvas site. You do not need to purchase or download any additional reading for this course. If you want to explore one or more of the course topics further, please contact me, and I can point you to an additional bibliography.

Accommodations

Brown University is committed to the full inclusion of all students. Please inform me before the course (or on the first day of class) if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any course procedures. You may speak with me before/after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

Late Submissions and Absences

Late submissions of any assignment will not be accepted for full marks except under documented emergency circumstances. Please, contact me in advance if you have any issues that impede your ability to complete the assignments on time. Otherwise, a late penalty will be applied to your grade. No assignment may be submitted more than a week late. Remember that attendance is mandatory and will positively impact your class participation grade. Any absence will count against your participation grade.

Office hours

My office hours will be on Monday 6/26, Wednesday 6/28, and Thursday 6/29 from 1-3pm at the Rockefeller Library (first floor). You can register [here](#). Please, do not hesitate to speak to me before or after class (or by email) if you want to meet on a different day/time.

Assignment Formatting

There are specific rules in academic writing. All the written assignments for the class should be in Times New Roman 12, with 1.5 line spacing and margins justified. Do *not* forget to include your

name, my name, the course name, and the assignment title at the beginning of the document. Including page numbers at the top or the bottom is also a good habit.

Writing Center

Writing clearly is a skill that will only benefit you; therefore, I encourage you to schedule an appointment with Brown's Writing Center. You can register [here](#). I have found this resource extremely useful during my Ph.D. studies.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are unacceptable. Any student who plagiarizes will fail the course and receive any other sanction imposed by the University. Handing in someone else's work or ideas as your own (even if you worked on it together as a group) constitutes plagiarism, as does using someone's ideas without appropriate citations. You must give a citation when you use an author's ideas in your writing, even if you do not quote the text word-for-word. For more information on the University's academic integrity policy, click [here](#). If you have any questions, please ask me. Be informed and be careful.

Diversity Statement

In this class, we will study political regimes, a sensitive topic affecting millions of lives worldwide. While we will discuss the class materials and readings from an analytical standpoint, we will also consider how political regimes' impacts may vary conditional on gender, race, country of origin, religion, sexuality, and cultural contexts. During our class discussions and assignments, it is paramount to remember our arguments' normative implications outside the classroom context, that is, the real-world implications for the citizens who live under different types of political regimes (especially non-democratic ones). In this course, academic rigor should go hand in hand with deep care for improving people's quality of life in democracies, non-democracies, and hybrid regimes.

Schedule

Class 1, Monday 6/26: Democracy

- Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press), Chapter 1 (pp. 1-16).
- Schmitter, Philippe C., and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What democracy is... and is not." *Journal of Democracy* 2:(3), pp. 75-88.

Recommended:

- Norris, Pipa, & Inglehart, Robert. 2001. Women and democracy: Cultural obstacles to equal representation. *Journal of democracy*, 12(3), 126-140.

Class 2, Tuesday 6/27: Non-Democratic Alternatives: Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism

- Linz, Juan J. 1964. "An Authoritarian Regime: Spain," in Erik Allardt and YrjöLittunen, eds., *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems: Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology*, Helsinki: Westermarck Society, pp. 291-341.
- Arendt, Hannah. "The origins of totalitarianism [1951]." *New York* (1973). Pages 305-318 & 341-351.

Recommended:

- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2008. "Credible power-sharing and the longevity of authoritarian rule." *Comparative political studies*, 41(4-5): 715-741.

Class 3, Wednesday 6/28: Democratization Processes

- Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. 2017. *Principles of comparative politics*. CQ Press. Chapter 6, pp. 175-187.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo, and Philippe Schmitter. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Recommended:

- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. What do we know about democratization after twenty years? *Annual review of political science*, 2(1), 115-144.

Class 4, Thursday 6/29: Hybrid Regimes

- O'Donnell, Guillermo. 1994. "Delegative democracy." *Journal of democracy*, 5:(1), pp. 55-69.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. "Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of democracy*, 13:(2), pp. 51-65.

Recommended:

- Collier, David, and Steven Levitsky. 1997. "Democracy with adjectives: Conceptual innovation in comparative research." *World politics* 49:(3), pp. 430-451.

Class 5, Friday 6/30: Challenges to Democracy

- Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. "On democratic backsliding." *Journal of Democracy*, 27:(1), pp. 5-19.
- Krekó, Péter, & Enyedi, Zsolt. 2018. Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's laboratory of illiberalism. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(3), 39-51; **OR**
- Thaler, Kai M. 2017. Nicaragua: A return to caudillismo. *Journal of Democracy*, 28(2), 157-169.

Recommended:

- Meyerrose, Anna M. 2020. "The Unintended Consequences of Democracy Promotion: International Organizations and Democratic Backsliding." *Comparative Political Studies* 53:(10-11), pp. 1547-1581.