



Workshop

Elections in Autocracies

Theoretical and Methodological debates on the study of Electoral
Authoritarian Institutions and their implications for stability and change in
Autocracies

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San Domenico di Fiesole (Florence, Italy)

Badia Fiesolana
Seminar Room 3

Abstract

Democracy needs elections, but elections do not make democracy. As of 2001, 46% of elections in political regimes worldwide are held under authoritarian rule. Scholars are increasingly interested in the role of institutions, normally associated with democracy, in authoritarian regimes. Within this expanding literature, the main concern in the debate is the question whether institutions explain stability and change in countries that are fully democratic on paper, yet authoritarian in practice. Commonly referred to as ‘electoral authoritarian’, these countries in the gray zone between democracy and full authoritarianism display institutional features that induced scholars to bring institutional theory into the study of authoritarianism.

The ‘democratic feature’ that attracted probably most scholarly attention is the institution that executives and legislatures need to be formally elected in multi-candidate/party elections. Scholars debate whether elections have a stabilizing effect on authoritarian regimes, enhance the probability of democratic transition or, alternatively, do not make a difference *as such*. Can we see institutions and their effects separately from their historical origin and the attributes of those who created the institution? Are (formal) multi-party elections sufficiently *exogenous* to justify them as a critical regime-attribute that distinguishes ‘electoral authoritarian’ regimes from other (authoritarian) regimes? If regime-classification is only based on *electoral* properties, we fail to observe the non-electoral properties potentially moderating (or confounding) the ‘effects’ of elections on regime dynamics. Consequently, poor regime conceptualization could lead to an overestimation of the effect of elections under authoritarianism.

The aim of this workshop is to introduce participants to the debate on codified institutions in authoritarian regimes and, in particular, the role of elections in authoritarian politics. Emphasis will be on the conceptual, methodological and theoretical puzzles and problems which emerge from the *state-of-the-art* literature on (contemporary) authoritarianism.

A number of leading experts in the field, as well as EUI-researchers and visiting scholars working in this area, present their work and ideas. Among them are **Jennifer Gandhi** (Emory University), **Jan Teorell** (Lund University and EUI) and **Carl H. Knutsen** (University of Oslo) who have recently published on authoritarianism in top academic journals.

Goals

- Introduction to political regime conceptualization and classification.
- Critical discussion of the *state-of-the-art* literature on authoritarianism.
- Identification of the methodological problems and case selection procedure in the study of Electoral Authoritarianism
- Theoretical implications of critical case studies in the distinction of Electoral Authoritarian regime over democracies and “closed autocracies”

Schedule

Day 1 (02/05/2016)

9:30 – 10:00 Introduction to the workshop

First session: The conceptualization and theoretical implications of Electoral Authoritarianism

10:00 – 13:00
(including coffee
break around
11:30)

Two approaches: Elections as a constitutive regime property or as epiphenomena.
- What is the role of ‘electoral contestation’ in defining authoritarian regimes?
- How to operationalize authoritarian regimes and their properties?
- What are the problems involved with case selection?
- Discussion of literature (see reading list)

13:00 – 14:30 *Lunch*

Second session: Conceptualizing and measuring authoritarian regime types: the structure of the executive and the role of elections

14:30 – 16:30

Lecture by **Prof. Jan Teorell** on the Structure of the executive and the multidimensionality of authoritarian regime-types (based on Teorell and Lindberg (2015)), followed by discussion.

Day 2 (03/05/2016)

9:30 – 17:30 **Third session:** Elections, Stability and Change

9:30 – 10:55 Presentation by **Prof. Carl Knutsen** on the paper ‘Autocratic Elections: Stabilizing Tool or Force for Change’, followed by discussion

10:55 – 11:05 *Coffee break*

11:05 – 12:30 Presentation by **Prof. Jennifer Gandhi** on the paper ‘Opposition Unity and Cooptation in Hybrid Regimes’, followed by discussion

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch*

14:00 – 15:00 When do Elections Subvert Authoritarianism? Electoral Malpractice and Variety of Post-Electoral Scenarios by **Margarita Zavadskaya**

15:00 – 15:35 Gaming the Unity of the Authoritarian Ruling Coalition: Electoral Cycles and Elite Defection in Electoral Autocracies by **Adrián del Río**

15:35 – 15:45 *Coffee break*

15:45 – 16:20 The Legislative Role of Parliaments in Authoritarian Regimes: Institutional and Structural Conditions for Legislative Influence by **Gerrit Krol**

16:20 – 17:20 The Distributive Game: Politically motivated allocation of the federal-regional transfers in Russia by **Igor Skulkin**

17:20 – 17:30 Conclusion of the workshop

Credits

In order to obtain credits, it is necessary to attend both days of the workshop and actively participate in the discussion. Participation requires critical in-depth reading of the prescribed literature. In addition, we ask students to submit a one-page response paper containing a theoretically relevant question concerning the literature and the workshop discussions. This response paper is to be submitted not later than a week after finishing the workshop.

Readings:

Day 1

- Howard, M. M., & Roessler, P. G. (2006). Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2), 365–381.
- Geddes, B., Wright, J., & Frantz, E. (2014). Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set. *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(2), 313–331.
- Morse, Y. L. (2012). The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism. *World Politics*, 64(1), 161–198.
- Teorell, J. and Lindberg, S.I. (2015). The Structure of the Executive in Authoritarian and Democratic Regimes: Regime Dimensions across the Globe, 1900-2014, Working Paper (Series 2015:5), V-Dem Institute.
- Wright, J., & Escribà-Folch, A. (2012). Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracy. *British Journal of Political Science*, 42(2), 283–310.

Day2

- Knutsen, C.H. and Nygård, H.M. (2015). Institutional Characteristics and Regime Survival: Why Are Semi-Democracies Less Durable Than Autocracies and Democracies? *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 656–670.
- Gandhi, J & Buckles, G. (forthcoming). ‘Opposition Unity and Cooptation in Hybrid Regimes’.
- Knutsen, C.H; Nygård, H.M & Wig, T. (under review). ‘Autocratic Elections: Stabilizing Tool or Force for Change’.