**Lecture 11 Authoritarian Regimes**

Recent developments in the US politics have triggered popular interests in authoritarianism.

* On July 18, President Donald Trump met Putin, the Russian President, in Helsinki.
* On June 12, President Trump met Kim Jong-Un, the leader of North Korea, in Singapore.

While these meeting have different agenda, they have also sparked a widespread concern about the current status of democracy in the world.

These concerns emerge especially after President Trump have made positive remarks about Putin, Kim, and other “strong” leaders in the world, including

* General Secretary Xi Jinping in China
* President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt
* President Rodrigo Duterte in the Phillipines
* President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey

An article from the Economist also expressed concern about the possible crisis for democracy.

However, at the same time, many have also argued that such concern may be misplaced.

* According to a study by Pew Research Center, public support for democracy remains strong.
* In a recent article, Daniel Treisman, a UCLA professor of political science, also argues that it remains immature to presume a crisis for democracy.

In any case, it is crucial that we understand what authoritarian regimes are and how they work differently from democracies. We also hope to understand that how authoritarian regimes stay alive.

*Lecture Structure*

* Definition and terminology
* Identifying an authoritarian regime
* How authoritarian regimes differ (selectorate theory?)
* How dictators stay in power

**Definition and Terminology**

How do we define an authoritarian regime?

It is a very difficult job, because how we define a country’s regime type very often may depend on our personal views toward a particular country.

We will need a clear, systematic set of definitions to measure each country’s regime type objectively.

Luckily, several scholars have undertaken such a difficult task.

*Cheibub, Gandhi and Przeworski (2010)*

For a regime to be democratic, both the ***chief executive*** ***office*** and the ***legislative body*** must be filled by regular and competitive elections.

* *Ex ante uncertainty*: The outcome of the election is not known before it takes place.
* *Ex post irreversibility*: The winner of the electoral contest does takes office.
* *Repeatability*: elections that meet the first two criteria occur at regular and known intervals.

*Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2015).*

A span of years is coded as ***autocratic*** if any of the following took place.

* An executive achieved power through undemocratic means. “Undemocratic” refers to any means besides direct, reasonably fair, competitive elections.
* The government achieved power through democratic means (as described above), but subsequently changed the formal or informal rules, such that competition in subsequent elections was limited.
* Competitive elections were held to choose the government, but the military prevented one or more parties that substantial numbers of citizens would be expected to vote for from competing and/or dictated policy choice in important areas.

What do you see in common?

* Countries that are not democratic are considered dictatorships or autocracies.
* Elections constitute the most fundamental aspect for both groups of scholars.

Do you find these criteria reasonable? Anything you might add? They may not be perfect, but they provide a very good start for future research.

Let me also say something about terminology.

Scholars have used many different terms when they refer to non-democratic states or authoritarian regimes.

Totalitarianism and authoritarianism are not really the same, why?

* *Authoritarianism* means that the regime has limited use of ideological indoctrination, limited extent of coercive mobilization, and limited social or political pluralism.
* *Totalitarianism* means that the regime has extensive use of ideological indoctrination, extensive extent of coercive mobilization, and no social or political pluralism.

Also,

* Autocracy means that in the regime there is a governor with absolute power.
* Dictatorship means that in the regime there is one invested with absolute authority.

Caveat: No normative judgment here. Politics is about tradeoff.

**Identifying an Authoritarian Regime**

How can we determine a country is an authoritarian regime?

Political scientists and policy researchers have tried many different ways to measure democracy, which in turn allows us to get a sense about how common authoritarian regimes are in the world.

*Freedom House*

Freedom House is a New York-based thinktank specialized in studying civil liberties and media freedom across different countries in the world.

Each year, Freedom House will invite experts that are familiar with the history and politics of each country to evaluate its degree of political rights and civil liberties, both of which are critical components of democracy.

Based on the evaluations of country experts, Freedom House then will assign a score between 0 and 100 for each country and categorize countries around the world into three groups: Not free, partly free, and free.

SLIDE – Freedom House (most recent)

SLIDE – 1945-now

SLIDE – the United States

SLIDE – China

*Polity score*

While Freedom House is commonly used, many scholars have argued that democracy and autocracy are by no means a black-and-white matter.

Instead of assigning each country a “category,” [CITE] propose a continuous measure of regime type. The Policy Project cover every country in the world after the 19th century.

Like Freedom House, the Polity Project designs a set of questions to evaluate how democratic a country is.

For instance, the Polity Project asks whether a country institutional constrains the power of its executive leaders, whether its executive leaders are selected through competitive, regular elections, and whether political participation is open, and so on so forth.

Based on the responses to these questions, the Polity Project then assigns each country a score between -10 and 10, with higher number suggesting higher levels of democracy.

However, unlike Freedom House, the Polity Project does not impose a category on a country.

The Polity Project leaves the question of categorization to scholars themselves. Depending on different research questions, scholars will set a threshold, say 0, to construct the distinction between democracy and non-democracy.

SLIDE – Polity Score (most recent)

SLIDE – 1945-now

SLIDE – the United States

SLIDE – China

*Other datasets: DD and ARD*.

Of course, there are not the only data available to tell us if a country is a democracy or an authoritarian regime.

The first dataset (Democracy and Dictatorship, DD) is created by Professor Adam Przeworski at New York University and his colleagues.

The second dataset (Autocratic Regime Data, ARD) is constructed by UCLA Professor Barbara Geddes and her former students.

SLIDE – Most recent

SLIDE – 1945-now (selected years)

SLIDE – the United States

SLIDE – China

However, here is the twist: Unlike Freedom House and the Polity Project, these two datasets take one more step to identify different “types” of authoritarian regimes. We will come to this point later.

*Several key lessons.*

Let me conclude our data exploration with the following comments.

First, although different measures are created based on different criteria, they suggest some common trends about democracy and dictatorship in the world.

* Third-wave democratization.
* Post-Cold War hype about democracy – victory of democracy over communism.
* Democratic “reversal” in the new millennium.
* Rise of anocracy.

Second, you should realize no measure is “perfect.” That is exactly why all scholars have to clearly define their criteria before they determine each country’s regime type.

Some scholars focus on human rights conditions, while some focus more on political institutions.

It will be very interesting to conduct further research to compare the similarity and differences across different measures of regime types.

**Varieties of Authoritarian Regimes**

Authoritarian regimes differ along with two dimensions: (1) Who controls the ruling power? (2) who has influences over policy-making (recruitment and succession)?

* Military: A group of military officers (military *junta*) decides who will rule and influences policy.
* Single-party: A party dominates access to political office and controls policy.
* Personalist: A single leader owns the discretion over the access to office and the fruits of office.
* Monarchy.

Of course, this is not the only typology we have. Other scholars have proposed their own typology based on different research questions.

DD (also CGG): Monarch, civilian, and military.

Wintrobe: Tinpot, totalitarian, tyranny, and timocrat.

What might be the pitfalls of trying to “categorize” authoritarian regimes in the world?

* The biggest issue is sometimes it is not easy to fit one country into a single category.

**Regime Types and Authoritarian Survival**

You may ask yourself: Do different types of authoritarian regimes matter?

It turns out the answer is yes. Different types of authoritarian regimes appear to vary in terms of the chance of democratic transition as well as how these transitions will take place.

For military regimes,

* Priority is to assure the survival and effectiveness of the military itself.
* Military officers enter, operate, and leave politics as the coordination game (Battle of Sexes).
* The survival of military guarantees their political survival during the transition.
* As a result, they are sensitive to splits within the ruling elite.
* They tend to be brought down by consensus among ruling officials and by initiating post-transition negotiations to assure the life “after politics.”
* Military regimes are inherently more fragile. They will disintegrate more quickly during economic crisis.

For single-part regimes,

* Priority is to hold office and secure the party's power.
* All factions enter and operate politics as a coordination game with “cooperation” as the best outcome in equilibrium.
* The minor faction loses utility at the absence of the major faction in power and the major faction is weakened when the minor faction out of power.
* More durable at the presence of rival factions by co-opting them. Leaving office does not resolve the problems of policy difference, leadership struggle, and succession crisis.
* Tend to be brought down by exogenous events (which in turn induce internal divisions) but many politicians remain active after the transition.
* They rarely initiate transitions but transitions normally start by liberalization (gradual increase in political participation, opposition representation, and responding to opposition demands).
* Single-party regimes are durable since it is less dependent on the health of a single leader.

For personalist regimes,

* Survival depends on a single person and the ruling clique.
* Priority is to secure personal power through repression and through “divide and rule” (distributing benefits to the ruling coalition).
* More durable at the presence of rival factions by holding high cost of plotting opposition and by restricting the circle of coalition to retain the shares of spoils among elites.
* Tend to be brought down when the leader becomes incapacitated (undermining the leader’s repressive capacity, thus prone to rebellion or invasion) and during economic crisis (undermining the leader’s capacity of distributing benefits and profit opportunities to the members of ruling coalition).
* The cost of transition is very high for personalist autocrat (not monarchies).

Monarchy vs. personalist regime

* Leaders of monarchies come to power because of the family or kinship ties.
* In this vein, they may survive longer than other types of personalist autocracies while survive shorter than single-party autocracies.
* Hybrid: There are nine of them at this moment (e.g. North Korea - party and personalist; North Korea is not a military autocracy since the military is in the hands of party while the party leaders assume military leadership).

**How Autocrats Stay in Power**

What can dictators do to stay in power? What tools are available?

First, the most straightforward strategy is perhaps to rule by fear. Dictators can simply conduct ***repression*** to prevent their people from rebellion.

But real life is actually more complicated.

On the one hand, dictators have to decide *how* they would like to repress in their regimes.

* Who should be repressed? Selective or universal?
* What is the purpose of repression?
* Is there enough information for the repression decisions?
* Are those responsible for carrying out repression under my command?
* Too much repression might be counterproductive.
  + Dictators that hope to stay in power for a long time cannot continue to repress people forever because repression can reduce the amount of human resources available for economic production.
  + Too much repression will discourage loyalty.

A better strategy for dictators is to combine carrots and sticks – that is, include ***patronage*** into their consideration.

Patronage also provides a possible explanation for why many oil-exporting countries remain undemocratic – they can provide public goods to “buy” support without imposing the cost on their people as taxes.

Often dictators want to maintain a certain level of economic inequality. For instance, many dictators choose to focus their patronage supply on urban citizens.

**[ NORTH KOREA ]** – Electricity as a patronage good.

Many dictators also decide to ***restrict the flow of information***. Why?

**[ CHINA ]** –A classical case of information control by authoritarian regimes.

A recent study conducted by a group of scholars at Harvard discover that the Chinese government does not censor all messages on the Internet.

Information technology also helps governments know their people better (e.g., credit score).

Finally, as one of the readings discussed, many authoritarian regimes also have nominally democratic institutions, especially ***elections***.

**[ SLIDE ]** – A recent study of me and another PhD student shows that nearly every authoritarian regime holds regular, direct elections for national legislature.

In fact, the increasing popularity of elections in authoritarian regimes has contributed to the rise of ***electoral authoritarianism***.

**[ SLIDE ]** – But according to a recent study by Pipa Norris, a professor at Harvard University, elections in authoritarian regimes are usually seen unfair and less competitive.

In many authoritarian regimes, dictators hold the power to disqualify candidates or political parties from participating in elections. Dictators sometimes also manipulated elections in their favor by buying the votes or changing electoral rules.

Why authoritarian regimes bother to have elections? A popular explanation is dictators try to maintain some level of political legitimacy, but this explanation does not make much sense.

Recent studies have provided the following explanations.

* Elections may help authoritarian regimes avoid succession crisis.
* Elections allow dictators to co-opt different political forces into their inner circle.
* Elections allows dictators to signal his dominance within the regime.
* Elections may also provide (noisy) information about people’s preferences.
* Elections, local elections in particular, helps dictators gather various information about their local agents.

**3-D Politics**

All these strategies allow dictators to stay in power by keeping the integrity of their winning coalition and selectorate.

* Selectorate
  + Nominal: Whoever has some legal say in choosing their leader.
  + Real: Whoever has the real influence in choosing their leader.
* Winning coalition: Whose support is necessary for the leader to stay in power.

Implications.

* Low loyalty norm (small W/S ratio) tends to sustain a leader longer as defecting is costly. Empirically, monarchies (small W and small S), followed by personalist (small W and large S?), dominant party (small W and large S), democracy (large W and large W), and military regimes (small W and small S).
* Institutions shape the incentive of spending. Incumbent needs to consider how much must be spent on W (for his welfare) and how much should be allocated between private and public goods (for W’s welfare).
* Large winning coalition incentivizes the focus on the provision of public goods (because it has fixed cost rather than unit cost), hence reducing the difference between those within and outside the winning coalition. The value of private goods and the portion of spending on private goods decrease, as the size of winning coalition grows large.
* Leaders with strong loyalty norm spend less on the coalition while retaining more for their own use or to salvage their incumbency if they find themselves at risk of being deposed. Leaders with weak loyalty norm need to try harder to maintain support by constraining personal expropriation.
* When citizens are patient, the incumbent’s inherent advantage in providing future private goods weighs heavily in a current supporter’s calculations. Incumbent only has to offer a low level of rewards relative to challenger’s proposal.

**Conclusion**

We have spent nearly two hours discussing the definition of authoritarian regimes and how different types of authoritarian regimes work. I hope my lecture will help you understand these non-democratic states better.

To conclude our discussion, I’d like to highlight three points.

First, no dictator rules alone. You should have understood why this is the case by far. Even personalist leader has to account for his small winning coalition to stay in power.

Second, you should also ask yourself what really makes the difference between democracy and autocracy. In many ways they are similar, so what really defines their distinctions?

Finally, remember it is always about tradeoff. This lecture by no means allows you to make a judgment about whether autocracy is necessarily better than democracy (and vice versa).