

Introduction à la science politique

Politique comparée II

**Recul démocratique ("democratic backsliding")**

Lukas Haffert

17.10.2025

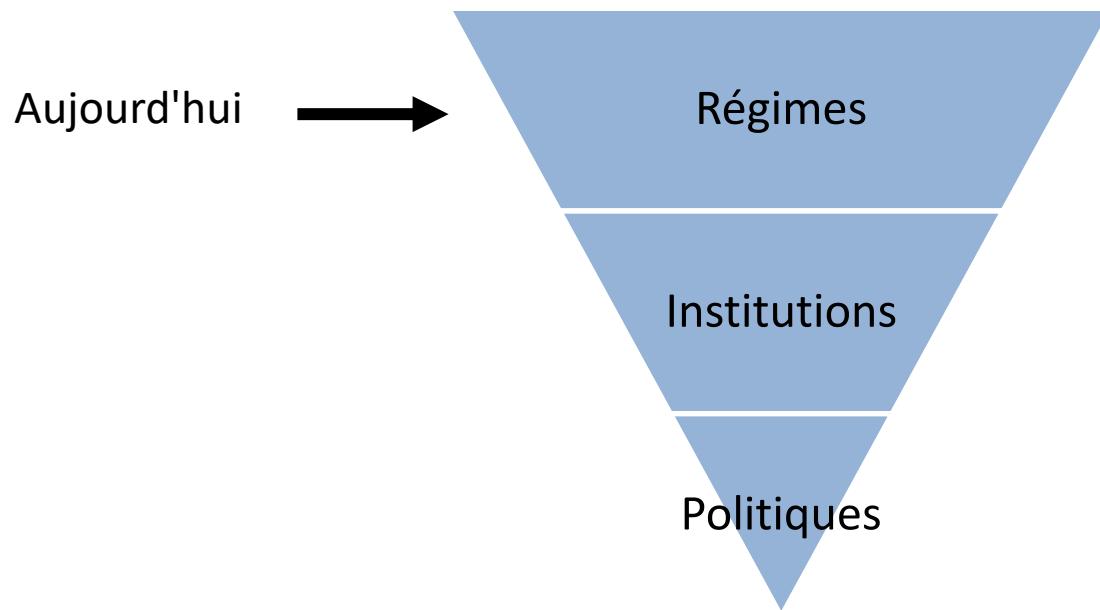
# Exemple de question d'examen

Quelle affirmation concernant les régimes autoritaires compétitifs est correcte ?

- A : La concurrence avec les autres pays est l'objectif principal du gouvernement.
- B : La concurrence politique est équitable, mais pas libre.
- C : Les élections sont le principal moyen d'accéder au pouvoir.
- D : Seuls les hommes ont le droit de vote.



# Structure de ce bloc



# Avez-vous lu l'article ?

Levitsky, S. and Way, L. 2025: The Path to American Authoritarianism. What Comes After Democratic Breakdown. In: Foreign Affairs 3/4 2025.



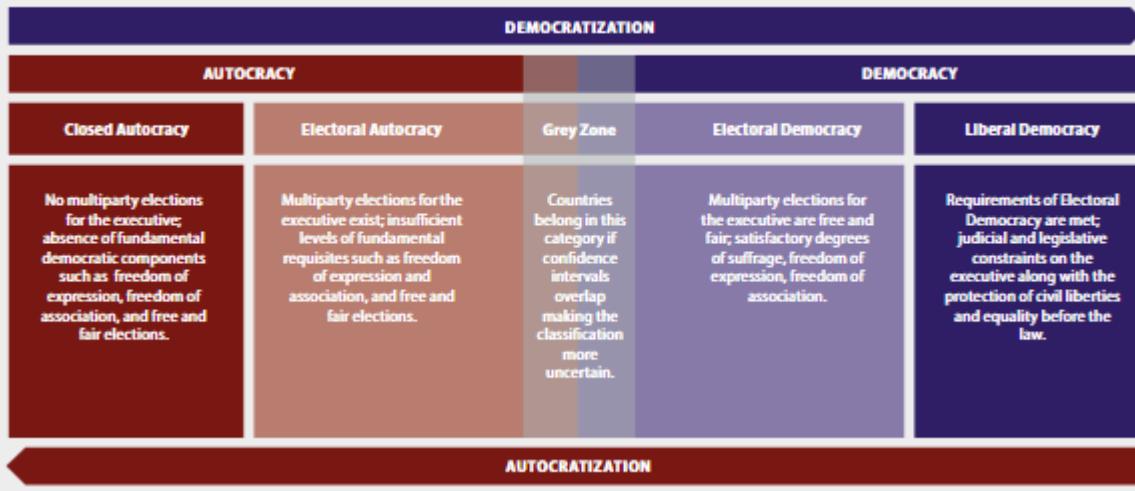
# Ordre du jour

- 1) Motivation
- 2) L'importance du changements graduels pour la politique comparée
- 3) Définition du democratic backsliding
- 4) Manifestations concrètes du democratic backsliding

# 1) Motivation: Pourquoi cette session?



FIGURE 1. REGIMES AND REGIME CHANGE



# Pourquoi cette session?



## 2) L'importance du changements graduels

Question fondamentale en sciences politiques : comment appréhender le changement institutionnel ?

- Une approche : il existe un niveau élevé de stabilité institutionnelle, ponctué par de courtes périodes de changement intense.
  - Les révolutions, les guerres (civiles), les grandes réformes constitutionnelles, etc.
- Autre approche : la plupart des changements se produisent lentement et progressivement, il est difficile d'identifier un seul « tipping point ».
  - Facteurs à progression graduelle tels que l'évolution des valeurs, la démographie, les changements technologiques, les réformes politiques progressives

# Chute de la démocratie dans le passé

- Au XXe siècle, les démocraties en déclin ont **rapidement** évolué vers de nouveaux régimes.
- Formes : Coups d'État, Autogolpes (coups d'État exécutifs)
- Exemples : Allemagne 1933, Grèce 1967, Argentine 1976

# Chute de la démocratie aujourd'hui

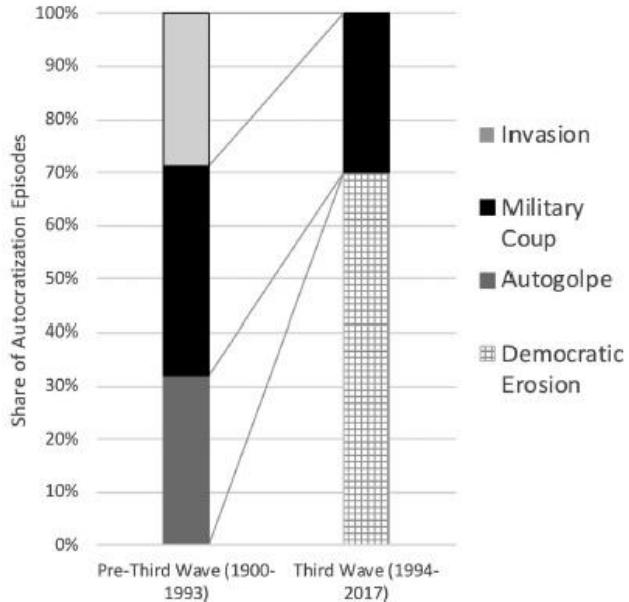
- Au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les transitions rapides sont devenues l'exception..
- Aujourd'hui, nous observons principalement un déclin graduel de la démocratie.

OPINION  
GUEST ESSAY

## How Will We Know When We Have Lost Our Democracy?

May 8, 2025

# Modes d'autocratisation



**Figure 3.** Types of autocratization of democracies.

Note: 28 episodes are included in the pre-third wave period, and 47 in the third wave.

Source: Lührmann, A. & S. Lindberg (2019) A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?,  
Democratization, 26:7, 1095-1113

### 3) Definition backsliding

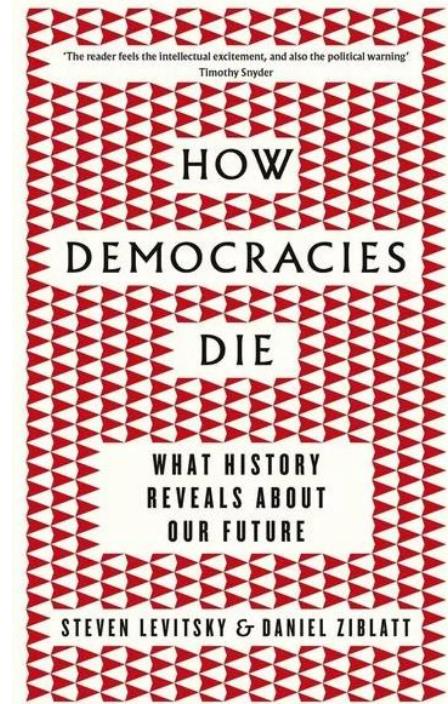
Le phénomène le plus courant aujourd'hui, en particulier dans les démocraties établies.

"State-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy."

Source: Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy* 27, p. 5

"Democracies still die, but by different means... Democratic backsliding today begins at the ballot box".

Source: Steven Levitsky/ Daniel Ziblatt, 2018. *How democracies die*, p. 5

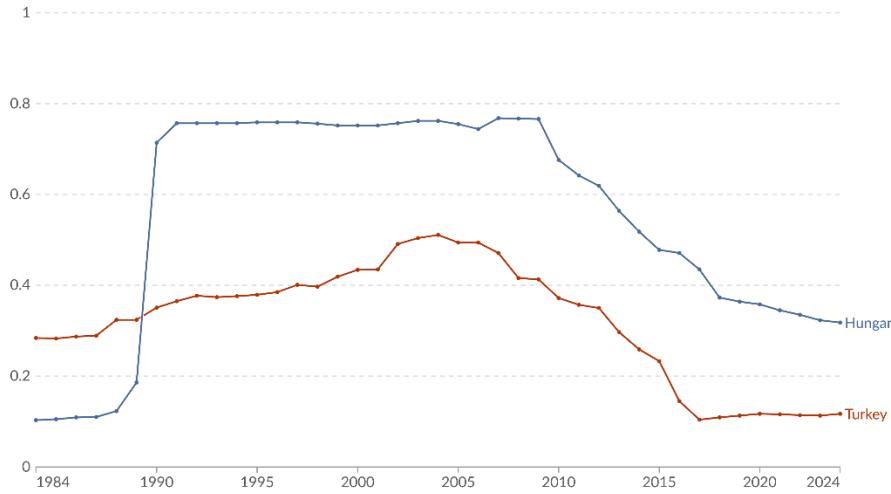


# "Backsliding" dans les mesures de la démocratie

Liberal democracy index, 1984 to 2024

Our World  
in Data

Data by V-Dem<sup>1</sup>. Expert estimates of the extent of voting rights, the freedom and fairness of elections, freedoms of association and expression, civil liberties, and executive constraints. The index ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).



Data source: V-Dem (2025)

OurWorldinData.org/democracy | CC BY

1. V-Dem The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project publishes data and research on democracy and human rights. It relies on evaluations by around 3,500 country experts and supplementary work by its own researchers to assess political institutions and the protection of rights.  
The project is managed by the V-Dem Institute, based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.  
Learn more:  
[Democracy data: how do researchers measure democracy?](#)  
[The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure democracy?](#)  
[The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure human rights?](#)

# Des questions ?



## 4) Manifestations concrètes du backsliding

- 1) Executive aggrandizement (agrandissement du pouvoir exécutif)
- 2) Weaponizing the state (utilisation de l'État comme arme)
- 3) Strategic election manipulation (manipulation électorale stratégique)

## 3.1 Executive Aggrandizement

Bermeo: “when elected executives weaken checks on executive power one by one, undertaking a series of institutional changes that hamper the power of opposition forces to challenge executive preferences”

Source: Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy* 27, p. 10

- Réduire les compétences des parlements, augmenter celles de l'exécutif
- Réduire l'indépendance de l'administration publique
- Affaiblir les tribunaux ou renforcer le contrôle du gouvernement sur eux.
- Renforcer le contrôle du gouvernement sur les médias.

# Compréhension

Levitsky et Way écrivent :

"After Orban became prime minister in 2010, his government stripped public employees of key civil service protections, fired thousands, and replaced them with loyal members of the ruling Fidesz party. Likewise, Poland's Law and Justice party weakened civil service laws by doing away with the competitive hiring process and filling the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the military with partisan allies."



Pourquoi s'agit-il d'un exemple d'Executive Aggrandizement?

## 3.2 Weaponizing the state

### **The Path to American Authoritarianism**

What Comes After Democratic Breakdown

*Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way*

Foreign Affairs, Published on February 11, 2025

STEVEN LEVITSKY is David Rockefeller Professor of Latin American Studies and Professor of Government at Harvard University and a Senior Fellow for Democracy at the Council on Foreign Relations.

LUCAN A. WAY is Distinguished Professor of Democracy in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

They are the authors of *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War.*

## 3.2 Weaponizing the state

Levitsky/Way: “much of the coming authoritarianism will take a less visible form: the politicization and weaponization of government bureaucracy”

“The most visible means of weaponizing the state is through targeted prosecution. Virtually all elected autocratic governments deploy justice ministries, public prosecutors’ offices, and tax and intelligence agencies to investigate and prosecute rival politicians, media companies, editors, journalists, business leaders, universities, and other critics.”

# "Shock and Law"



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

September 20, 2025, 6:44 PM

[Original Post](#)

Pam: I have reviewed over 30 statements and posts saying that, essentially, "same old story as last time, all talk, no action. Nothing is being done. What about Comey, Adam "Shifty" Schiff, Leticia??? They're all guilty as hell, but nothing is going to be done." Then we almost put in a Democrat supported U.S. Attorney, in Virginia, with a really bad Republican past. A Woke RINO, who was never going to do his job. That's why two of the worst Dem Senators PUSHED him so hard. He even lied to the media and said he quit, and that we had no case. No, I fired him, and there is a GREAT CASE, and many lawyers, and legal pundits, say so. Lindsey Halligan is a really good lawyer, and likes you, a lot. We can't delay any longer, it's killing our reputation and credibility. They impeached me twice, and indicted me (5 times!), OVER NOTHING. JUSTICE MUST BE SERVED, NOW!!! President DJT

BBC

## Former FBI director James Comey indicted on two charges

27 September 2025

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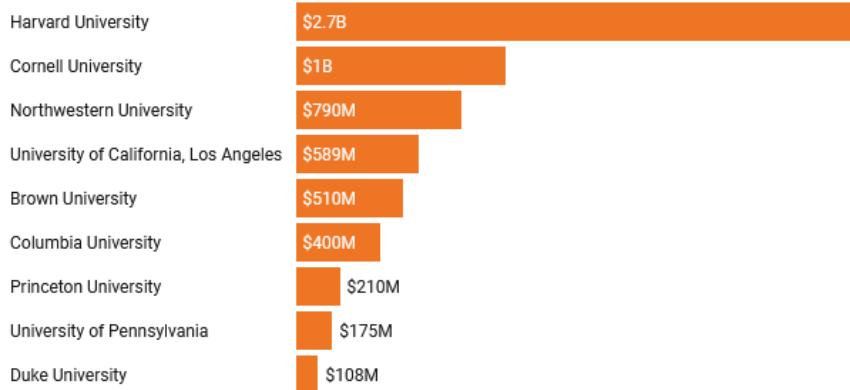
# "Trump will almost certainly deploy the Department of Education against universities"

## Timeline: Trump administration's actions against Harvard University

Harvard says Trump is waging a "campaign of retaliation" against the school.



### Frozen Funding Totals Vary Across Colleges



### Columbia University to pay \$200m in settlement with Trump administration

24 July 2025

**Brandon Drenon** BBC News, Washington DC

Share Save

# "Honey Trap"

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≡ **CNN** Business Markets Tech Media Calculators Videos

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Business / Tech

## Smartphones and computers are now exempt from Trump's latest tariffs

By Auzinea Bacon, CNN

⌚ 4 min read · Updated 2:19 PM EDT, Sat April 12, 2025

**(CNN)** — Electronics imported to the United States will be exempt from President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs, according to a [US Customs and Border Protection notice](#) posted late Friday.

Smartphones, computer monitors and various electronic parts are among the exempted products. The exemption applies to products entering the United States or removed from warehouses as early as April 5, according to the notice.

The exemption, which comes after the Trump administration on Wednesday imposed a minimum tariff rate of 145% on Chinese goods imported to the United States, does not include the 20% tariff on Chinese goods for the country's role in the fentanyl trade. The tariff exemption would have a major impact on tech giants like Apple, which make iPhones and other products in China.

### 3.3 Manipulation électorale stratégique

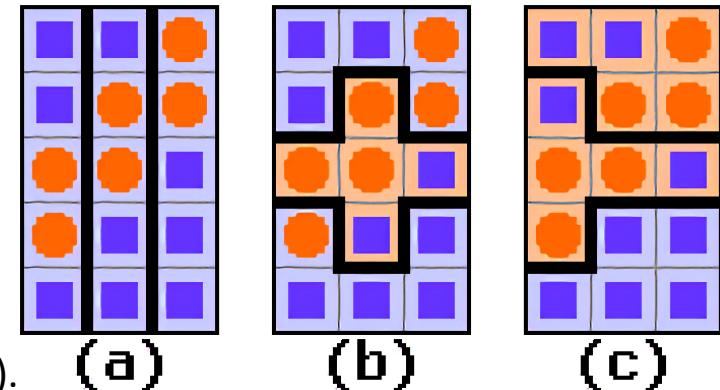
Bermeo: “Today, only amateurs steal elections on election day.”

“These include hampering media access, using government funds for incumbent campaigns, keeping opposition candidates off the ballot, hampering voter registration, packing electoral commissions, changing electoral rules to favor incumbents, and harassing opponents—but all done in such a way that the elections themselves do not appear fraudulent.”

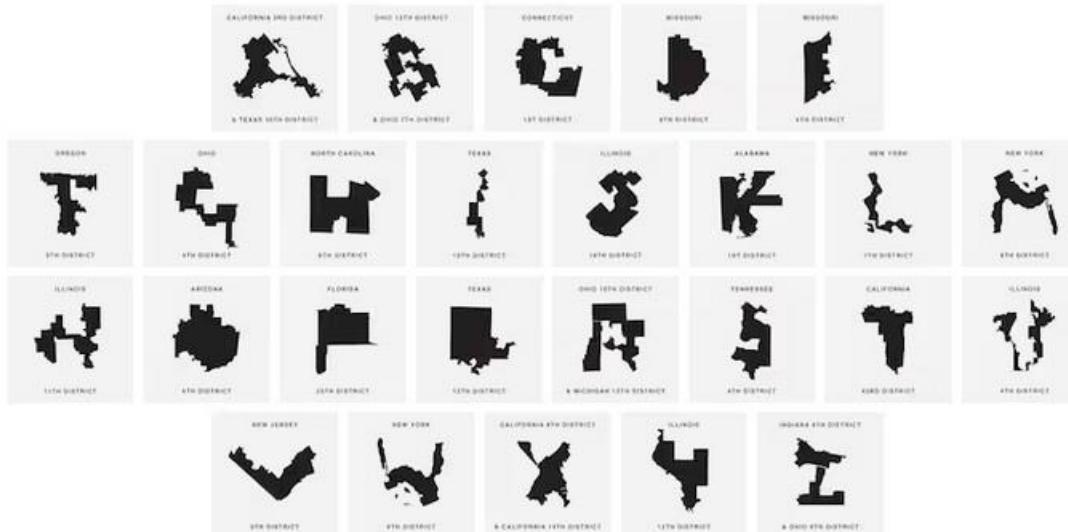
Source: Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy* 27, p. 13

# "Gerrymandering"

- Les districts sont établies par les États.
- C'est une invitation à l'abus :
  - Créer quelques districts regroupant le plus grand nombre possible d'électeurs de votre adversaire ("Packing").
  - Créez de nombreux districts dans lesquels vous disposez d'un avantage faible mais solide ("Cracking").
- Dans l'exemple de droite, 9 électeurs bleus et 6 électeurs rouges peuvent être répartis de la manière suivante :
  - Les bleus remportent les 3 circonscriptions (a) ("cracking" des rouges)
  - Les bleus gagnent 2, les rouges 1 (b)
  - Les bleus gagnent 1, les rouges 2 (c) ("packing" du bleus)



# Quelques vrais districts existants



# L'original Gerrymander



# Diapositive de mardi: Un terrain de jeu inégal

Dans les régimes autoritaires compétitifs, l'opposition est fortement désavantagée :

- un accès inégal aux ressources.
- un accès inégal aux médias.
- un accès inégal au système juridique.

# Vers un autoritarisme compétitif?

## Levitsky/Way:

"The breakdown of democracy in the United States will not give rise to a classic dictatorship in which elections are a sham and the opposition is locked up, exiled, or killed. Even in a worst-case scenario, Trump will not be able to rewrite the Constitution or overturn the constitutional order... **There will be elections in 2028, and Republicans could lose them...**

But authoritarianism does not require the destruction of the constitutional order. **What lies ahead is not fascist or single-party dictatorship but competitive authoritarianism**—a system in which parties compete in elections but the incumbent's abuse of power tilts the playing field against the opposition."

# Ce que vous devez avoir appris aujourd'hui

- L'importance et les défis de l'analyse des changements graduels
- Définition du democratic backsliding
- Les éléments clés du democratic backsliding

# Lecture du mardi

Schiffino et al,      Chapitre 7, p. 311-322  
                          Chapitre 8, p. 352-367