

Section Memo 1 Assignment – Autocratizing Country Report

Due by Thursday, May 2nd, 2024 at 11:59 pm on Canvas

Overview

The world is experiencing a wave of democratic decline. More countries today are autocratizing (42) than are democratizing (14) and 43% of the world's population lives in an autocratizing country¹. Moreover, not only are democracies becoming less democratic, such as Armenia and Greece, but existing autocracies are becoming further autocratic, such as Russia, the Philippines, and Burkina Faso. This assignment has you choose a country that is currently experiencing autocratization and analyze the recent political events and institutional changes that are responsible for this shift. Your analysis will focus on key institutional shifts and their implications for democracy to answer the following question:

What are some of the main institutional changes responsible for the current autocratization of the country of your choice?

Instructions

1. Choose **one** country from the following list of countries that are autocratizing. I recommend that you choose a country you have an interest in, but don't already know a lot about.

Note: * indicates countries that have started to autocratize only recently and ** indicates countries that have started to autocratize long ago.

- Afghanistan*
- Armenia*
- Mauritius**
- Brazil
- Burkina Faso*
- El Salvador**
- Ghana
- Greece*
- Guatemala*
- Hungary
- India
- Mali*
- Myanmar
- The Philippines
- Russia
- Serbia

¹ Autocratization refers to a more advanced or pronounced stage of democratic backsliding (or becoming less democratic) such as shifts away from liberal democracy or electoral democracy to electoral autocracy or closed autocracy. It does not mean the country is necessarily autocratic (although existing autocracies can autocratize further), just that it is moving in that direction.

- Thailand
- Tunisia**
- Turkey

2. **Provide context (max 1 paragraph).** Instead of writing a generic introduction paragraph, start by providing a brief background on the country's democratic history, current regime, and significant political events from the last decade that relate to the level of democracy in the country. Your background section should answer the following questions:
 - i. What is the name of the country and where is it located in the world?
 - ii. What is the current regime type and/or level of democracy in the country, citing sources like V-Dem, Freedom House, or Polity?
 - iii. How long has the process of moving away from democracy been going on? Is it a process that began long ago or more recently?
 - iv. Optional: Has the country had any past episodes of autocratization and if so, were its outcomes permanent (e.g., regime change)?

3. **Discuss the main institutional changes responsible for autocratization.** Identify 2-3 major institutional changes that have contributed to the shift away from democracy in the country and describe them in detail. The description should discuss specific institutional changes in the context of the country, not in the abstract.
 - i. Such changes may include...changes to the judiciary, changes to the legislative process that undermines legislative power or favors the executive, alterations to the constitution, modifications to the electoral process, media restrictions, or decentralization or centralization of power

4. **Now, explain the implications of these institutional changes.** For each institutional change in section #3, explain why it is important and problematic for democracy, as well as which characteristic of democracy it is affecting.
 - i. Consider aspects such as the erosion of checks and balances, suppression of opposition or dissent, obstruction of the free flow of information, and the undermining of free and fair elections.
 - ii. Tip: When writing, think of part 3+4 as connected

5. **Conclusion.** Conclude with a brief discussion of the potential for a “U-Turn” back towards democracy following these episodes of autocratization. Questions to consider addressing in your conclusion:
 - i. How likely is it that democracy will be restored or maintained in the country?
 - ii. Is there ongoing resistance and defiance in the face of autocratization and what sorts of actions has this resistance consisted of?
 - iii. What are the main obstacles to successful resistance in the country?

Guidelines

1. The memo should be 2pgs, double-spaced, standard 10-12pt font with 1" margins
 - a. Bibliography is not included in this page count
2. The memo should be logically and coherently organized, and the writing should be clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.
3. Any reference to an outside source must be properly cited using a consistent citation style, including a separate list of references. Additionally, all submissions are filtered through TurnItIn's plagiarism and AI detector. See this link for citation guidance: <https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/avoiding-plagiarism-mastering-art-scholarship>.
 - a. Chicago or American Political Science Association style are recommended, but you are welcome to choose whichever style you prefer.
 - b. For Chicago style - https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and_style_guide/web_sources.html
 - c. For APSA style - <https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/sample-page/paranthesical-citations/>
4. All outside information should come from reputable, high-quality sources. Blogs, substacks, thinktanks, Wikipedia, cable news, random websites, and YouTube clips are not considered appropriate. If you have questions about a particular source, please ask me ahead of time. Here are some sources to get you started:
 - Reputable news sources for recent developments - <https://www.reuters.com/>, <https://www.bbc.com/>, <https://apnews.com/>, <https://www.nytimes.com/>, <https://www.aljazeera.com/>, <https://www.cfr.org/>
 - Academic journal articles or books - <https://www.jstor.org/>, <https://library.ucdavis.edu/>
 - Reports from international watchdogs such as Freedom House, V-Dem, or the Human Rights Watch
5. **The memo is due no later than Thursday, May 2nd at midnight.** It must be submitted online, as either a PDF or MS Word docx file, via the Canvas assignment for 'First Memo'. I cannot accept hard copies, emailed papers, links to cloud-based documents, '.pages' file extensions, scanned or image files, or other file types. You are welcome to submit your paper as far in advance of the deadline as you'd like.