

Democratization in comparative perspective: between consolidation and crisis

Curso de pós-graduação FLS 6401
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Course description

For many decades, political and other social scientists have been interested in the emergence, survival and collapse of democracies. They have presented numerous explanatory approaches emphasizing economic development, social change, culture, the role of political elites, institutions, international dynamics such as globalization, trans-nationalization and diffusion, or different combinations of these factors. Recently, the initial optimism that greeted the onset of the “Third Wave” of democratization has cooled with the instability of many new democracies and the stabilization of competitive authoritarian regimes, and crisis phenomena even in democracies believed to be consolidated. These setbacks have led to a stronger focus on democratic backsliding and breakdown and on constraints posed by underdevelopment, persistent inequality, ethno-religious cleavages, or weak institutions. A variety of research methods were applied in order to empirically substantiate these explanatory approaches.

The course will present a broad overview of comparative democratization, discussing both ‘classic’ and more recent contributions. In particular, it will explore:

- Concepts and measures of democracy
- Core theoretical paradigms explaining the emergence and survival of democracy
- Trends in research on democratization, presenting new evidence on domestic and international factors, and in what ways they contribute to (or hinder) democratization
- Recent research on the crisis of democracy, democratic backsliding and democratic breakdown

Objectives

The explanation of the emergence, survival and collapse of democracies is one of the central puzzles in political science. It spans all subfields of political science and spills over into law, economics, history and sociology. Studying democratization in comparative perspective will familiarize students with different perspectives on political regime types, their emergence and their trajectory. Because different theoretical approaches in comparative democratization are associated with a preference for different methodological approaches and data sources, the seminar will also be relevant for the practical aspect of choosing the appropriate research design and research methods for dealing with a particular question.

The course will put a strong emphasis on comparison and will look at processes of democratization, democratic backsliding and regime change in different regions of the world, including not only Latin America and Europe, but also (depending on students’ interests) Sub Sahara Africa, the Middle East, and/or Asia. Considering these vastly different backgrounds, another objective of the course is to ask how far theories and generalizations can travel and whether the quest for an overarching theory of democratization may be misguided.

It is planned that the course will include guest lectures, and students will be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities (such as conferences or workshops related to the topic of the seminar). Given that the political developments in Brazil and other countries around the world are the subject of intense public debate, the course will also invite students to take some of the puzzles addressed in our meetings beyond the comfortable confines of academia and revisit political science theories in light of real-world events.

Requirements

Participation in class discussions, two critical reviews of the literature on a session topic of your choice, final paper combining the reviews with your dissertation or thesis topic (due after the end of the course).

Contents

Part I: Democracy: Concept and measurement

1. What is democracy? Presentation of the course and introduction
2. Conceptualizing and measuring democracy

Part II: Explaining democratization: Theoretical approaches

3. Structure-based approaches
4. Agency-centered approaches
5. Historical-comparative approaches

Part III: Directions in research on democratization

6. Recent research on political and social determinants
7. Globalization and trans-nationalization
8. External actors and democracy promotion

Part IV: Is democracy the only game in town?

9. Is there a crisis of democracy?
10. Is populism a threat to democracy?
11. Democratic backsliding: How and why?
12. How democracies die: theories of authoritarian reversal

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