Challenges to Democracy

Introduction

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About me

Mirko Wegemann (he/him)

- Since October 2024: Research Associate in the Department of Comparative Politics (Prof. Daniel Bischof)
- Previously: PhD Candidate at the European University Institute in Florence
- Research interests
  - Political parties
  - Political representation
  - Democratic norms
  - Methods: Experimental research and text-as-data

Tell me a bit about yourself...

A small survey:
https://www.menti.com/ald4fjujeits



Learning Outcomes

- Understanding of how we can define and measure democracy and backsliding

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- Analysing current trends in democratization and democratic quality

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- Analysing current trends in democratization and democratic quality
- Overview of causes for democratic backsliding and potential solutions
- Developing your own original research questions

Timetable I

Session 1	Introduction (today)
Block 1: Conceptualization and description (07 January 2027)	
Session 2	What is democracy?
Session 3	Democratic support coalitions
Session 4	Democratic backsliding
Session 5	Subverting institutions

Timetable II

Block 2: Analysing causes and solutions (21 January 2027)	
Session 6	Democratic norms and affective polarization
Session 7	Propaganda
Session 8	Solutions
Session 9	Term paper workshop

Course Infrastructure

- Communication and literature via Learnweb (please check your mails, password: **ctd_27**)
  - Literature research via ULB Münster, Google Scholar, or Web of Science
  - Access to most articles via the WiFi network of the University of Münster, from home via VPN
  - For an intro into the university library: Library Audiotour
- Slides on my website

Requirements I

Workload

Workload is always an approximation. If you need 5 ECTS, it's about 150 hours[1]

Participation in the course:

$$16 \textit{ hours}$$

Preparation and follow-up of the course + term paper

$$150 - 16 = 134 \textit{ hours}$$

[1] regulations

Requirements II

- Attendance and participation in each session (mandatory!)
- Prior engagement with the session literature
- Submit and present in author/review session
- Term paper on your own research project

Requirements III

- *Studienleistungen*: Submit and present in author/review session + pitch of your research project
- *Prüfungsleistung*: Term paper

Partial requirements 1 I

Author / reviewer

For all sessions

- read and engage with the session literature in advance
- make notes
- raise questions whenever something remained unclear

Partial requirements 1 II

Author / reviewer

For one sessions of your choice

- at home: carefully read empirical reading, summarize and list strengths and weaknesses
- submit your notes by Monday evening of your session (3-4 pages)
- during the session
  - you'll present the main take-away of the paper with others assigned to that session
  - you'll be randomly assigned as the author or the reviewer of that paper
  - as a reviewer, you identify the weaknesses of the paper
  - as an author, you try to defend your paper

Partial requirements 1 III

Author / reviewer

- all the others: together, you make a verdict of whether the paper should be passed to a revise and resubmit procedure or rejected and present the reasons for your decision

Partial requirements 2 I

Pitch your research project

At the end of the second block, you will pitch your ideas for your research project (for the term paper) to others. Beforehand, **at the latest on January 18**, you need to submit a draft (3-4 pages).

- You need to identify a research puzzle, i.e., a question that is relevant to study
- You sketch the theory for your question, most notably:
  - What's your proposed answer to your research question? (*expectation*)
  - Why do you think that's the right answer? (*mechanism*)
- You propose a potential research design to study that question

Partial requirements 2 II

Pitch your research project

Participation in the term paper workshop is mandatory for everyone. Even if you do not submit a term paper at the end of the course, you need to pitch a research project.

Partial requirements 3 I

Term paper

- if you need to submit a *Prüfungsleistung*, you are asked to submit a term paper by **March 31, 2027** at the latest
- length: **6,000 words** $\pm$ 10 percent (excluding table of contents, bibliography, and cover page)
- Choose your own topic, develop research hypotheses and propose an empirical design
- Standard format of an empirical paper: Introduction (incl. research question and motivation), literature review, theory section (incl. hypothesis development), case selection and method, conclusion but **no results**
- Pay attention to the correct citation style (guidelines, for example, here)
- Submission as a .pdf-file

Plagiarism I

"The act of plagiarism is fulfilled when in written study and examination performances "texts of third parties are taken in whole or in part, literally or nearly literally, and presented as one's own scholarly work." This practice "not only contradicts good scientific practice, but it is also a form of intellectual theft and thus a violation of copyright."

IfPol: Resolution by the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers

Plagiarism II

There are different **types of plagiarism**

- Plagiarism of whole work
- Citation without proper referencing
- Translation plagiarism
- Self plagiarism
- Ghostwriting

In case there is any suspicion of plagiarism, we will check the submission with the plagiarism detection *Turnitin*.

On the use of AI I

AI tools have facilitated various aspects of our lives. Can we use them in this seminar? **Yes**.

- be transparent about the use of AI
- *Be the human in the loop*: AI output depends on its input; bad input = bad output
- if AI is hallucinating, you'll be responsible for it
- I cannot accept output which is entirely written by AI
- useful tools:
  - **Chat**: Uni-GPT, Mistral AI, Duck AI
  - **Research**: Elicit, Consensus, Connected Papers, Research Rabbit

On the use of AI II

And, in general, in and outside the seminar:

- Take an AI vacation day. Before prompting anything to AI, how would you approach the research topic? Read the literature, write down notes, sketch a potential research question and your expectations about it.

Inclusion

We want to establish an open and inclusive culture in this seminar.

- Less relevant in English, but gender-sensitive language is used whenever possible in seminar communication
  - Studies on why it is useful to go beyond the generic masculine: Pérez and Tavits (2019) and Vervecken et al. (2013)
- You are welcome to share your pronouns.
- There is no place for racism, sexism, homo- or transphobia here.
- We learn together: all types questions are legitimate and welcomed, and knowledge gaps are no reason to feel ashamed.

Contact me

- After the seminar or during office hours (by prior email registration)
- Email: m.wegemann@uni-muenster.de
- Address
  Institute of Political Science
  Department: Comparative Politics
  Room: 223, Scharnhorststr. 100
  48151 Münster
- Feedback via LamaPoll or by email

Any further questions?

What's happening around us? I

On the one hand...

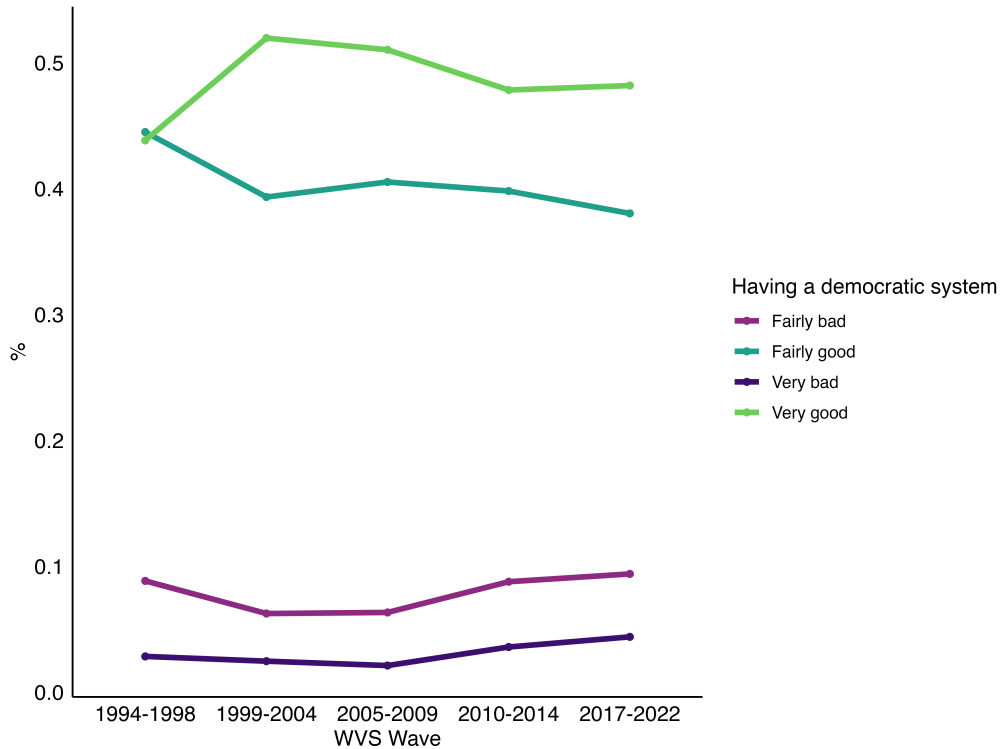


Figure: Having a democracy is... (WVS, Trend file 1981-2022)

Democracy is still a very popular regime type.

What's happening around us?

On the other hand...



Figure: Recent attacks on democratic institutions

But it has become threatened in recent years.

And how are people conceiving it? I



Figure: Majority of US citizens believe that democracy is under threat (CBS News)

Citizens are often aware of the threat.

And how are people conceiving it? II

The root of the problem is, however, very differently defined.

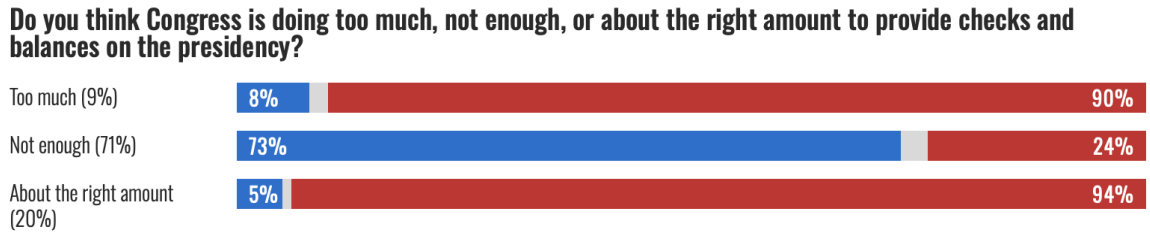


Figure: NBC News Exit Poll of yesterday's US Midterm election; Source: NBC

And how are people conceiving it? III



Figure: 'Is Trump a Threat to Democracy?' asked to MAGA-Supporters (Link)

What will help us to understand the current situation?

- Democracy is not a static concept, its conceptualization evolves
- Democratic quality is gradual, not dichotomous
- Challenges to democracy have different origins

A working definition of democracy

- dichotomous vs. gradual definitions
- minimalist vs. maximalist definitions
- electoral vs. liberal democracies
- tensions between democratic principles, like freedom vs. equality

Understanding its support coalitions

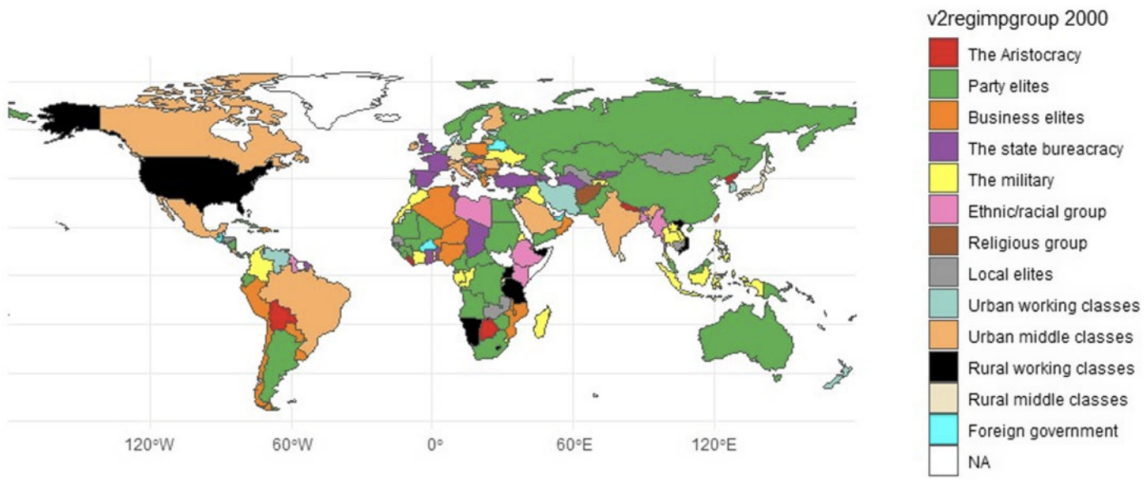


Figure 1. Mapping the most important support group variable (*v2regimpgroup*) in 2000.

Figure: Most important regime support coalitions by country in 2000 (Knutsen et al. 2025)

An Insight into (some) Challenges to Democracy

After we have established some common understanding of how democracy is defined and how it has evolved, we will look at potential causes for democratic backsliding

- Challenges from within:
  - Demand side: affective polarization, eroding norms
  - Supply side: sidelining institutions and misinformation
- challenges from the outside: global crises (like climate change) $\rightarrow$ we cannot cover this during the seminar, but if you're interested: Cerkez (2025) and Mittiga (2022)

Strengthening democracy

Several possible approaches

- militant democracy
- better performance?
- anti-polarization measures $\rightarrow$ we'll focus on these!

Next steps... I

- If you decide to take the seminar, enroll on Learnweb and indicate which session you want to serve as author/reviewer.
- If you decide not to take the seminar, please let me know (for my and our planning)
- Prepare the readings and your assignments.
- Attend our block seminar sessions on January 07 and January 21, 2027
- If you run into any troubles (accessing readings, etc.), please let me know in advance, not one day before the session!

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature I

Cerkez, N. (2025). *Extreme Weather Events and the Support for Democracy*.

Knutsen, C. H., Dahlum, S., Rasmussen, M. B., & Wig, T. (2025).Behind the Throne: Regime support coalitions around the world, 1789-2020. *British Journal of Political Science*, *55*, e37. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000656

Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M., & Lindberg, S. I. (2018).Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes. *Politics and Governance*, *6*(1), 60–77. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1214

Literature II

Mittiga, R. (2022).Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism, and Climate Change. *American Political Science Review*, *116*(3), 998–1011. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001301

Pérez, E. O., & Tavits, M. (2019).Language Influences Public Attitudes toward Gender Equality. *The Journal of Politics*, *81*(1), 81–93. https://doi.org/10.1086/700004

Vervecken, D., Hannover, B., & Wolter, I. (2013).Changing (S)expectations: How gender fair job descriptions impact children's perceptions and interest regarding traditionally male occupations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *82*(3), 208–220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.01.008