HYBRID REGIMES IN MODERN TIMES:
Between Democracy and Autocracy

Dr. Inna Melnykovska
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Central European University
Email: melnykovskai@ceu.edu

Winter semester 2021 (4 credits, 8 ECTS credits)

Class meetings:
tbc

Office hours:
tbc
Please make an appointment by e-mail!

Introduction to the issue

Hybrid regimes that alloy democratic rules with authoritarian governance are the most widespread political systems in the world at the beginning of the 21st century. Conventional accounts describe them as defective democracies or competitive authoritarian regimes. Alternative views point to the genuine features and functions of these regimes that cannot be reduced to those of half-democracies or half-autocracies. In fact, hybrid regimes are puzzling in several ways: (1) their establishment and sustainability have been unexpected either by the school of democratization/transitology or by the school of (new) authoritarianism; (2) neither democratic institutions (e.g. elections) nor autocratic institutions (e.g. dominant parties) function in a conventional way there; and (3) contrary to the expectations of stability, hybrid regimes have demonstrated a variety of (within-type) dynamics.

Topics

In this course, we will seek to unpack the category of hybrid regimes and explore the following questions:

- What are the origins of hybrid regimes?
- What are the specifics of their institutional functionality in comparison with democracies and/or autocracies?
- What determines their stability and dynamic nature?

We will review the major research approaches that analyze the political regimes in the ‘grey zone’ between democracy and autocracy and further link these approaches to the broader literature on statehood, economic development and social order. We will identify ‘who
governs’ in hybrid regimes and by which means (coercion, patronage, ideology, control of the Internet, among others) the power is exercised and maintained. We will look at how governments interact with elites and citizens, as well as with their regional neighbors and international community. Also, the strategies and the activities of opposition and civil society in the hybrid regimes will be studied. Finally, we will identify the ways the study of hybrid regimes can inform contemporary policies and practices in the democratization processes.

Regional focus

This course offers an opportunity to study the current landscape of hybrid regimes in Eastern Europe and Eurasia in depth and with a worldwide comparative perspective. Most of our focus will be on the post-Soviet area, where some of the most obvious examples of hybrid regimes may be found. In addition, hybrid regimes from Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia will be included in comparison. Each participant will take the role of a “country-expert”: assign to a preferred case of hybrid regime and represent this case in our discussion, group work exercises and presentations.

Approach to teaching and learning

Although our readings will include empirical material from different countries and regions, our seminar sessions will be thematic, dealing with one or another puzzling feature of hybrid regimes. A session will usually consist of three parts: first, we will critically review main conceptual and theoretical approaches and debates; second, we will deal with and explain the working of relevant empirical cases of hybrid regimes, and finally we will have a policy-relevant discussion or exercise on contemporary word-based problems related to the hybrid regimes.

The course will build on the techniques of collaborative and peer-to peer learning. In other words, students will learn from and with each other. Our sessions will include brainstorming exercise, team presentations, group work and discussions. Also, the course integrates exercises of a simulation game and role playing in order to let students experience real-life political processes in hybrid regimes and expose them to contemporary challenges of promoting democracy and good governance in the 21st century.

The instructor will overtake the functions of a coach and a moderator by generating discussion topics, raising questions, and developing collaborative exercises. She will make short inputs to the sessions. However, no lecturing should be expected. It means in this course student will learn by doing, not pure listening.

Pre-conditions

No prior knowledge is assumed. Some basic skills of qualitative research design and methodology is desired. On methodological issues I recommend to study the following readings to prepare for the course:


**Learning outcomes**

At the end of the course, you will

- gain the understanding of the differences between hybrid, democratic and authoritarian regimes;
- become familiar with the major research schools dealing with hybrid regimes, their (normative) premises as well as their strengths and weaknesses;
- accumulate the knowledge about the actors, institutions and processes responsible for establishment, functioning, and dynamics of hybrid regimes;
- understand the interaction mechanisms between actors and structures as well as the links between global and local in hybrid regimes;
- know specifics of East European and Eurasian hybrid regimes relative to the hybrid regimes in other world regions;
- learn how to identify empirical puzzles and how to address them with theoretical knowledge and methodological tools;
- be skilled in ‘translation’ of research findings into practical policy recommendations.

**Course requirements and assessment**

Regular attendance is required. Students are expected to be present at all seminars and to come prepared. If you are unable to attend class, you should notify me via e-mail prior to the session.

The grading follows the standard scale adopted by the Department of Political Science: A: 100-94; A-: 93-87; B+: 86-80; B: 79-73; B-: 72-66; C+: 65-59; F: 58-0

The final grade will be composed as follows:

- Active participation, including contributions as an expert on selected hybrid regime – 20%
- One presentation – 30%
- Presentation of research design – 15%
• Final paper – 35%

Active class participation is expected and graded. Students are required to read the assigned material, and participate in the discussions and working groups regularly. Students’ contributions should be informed by the readings, focused on the main analytical points, formulated clearly, refer to other contributions in discussions, and demonstrate critical engagement. Note that the quality of your contributions would count more than their quantity. In addition to class participation, students have the opportunity to contribute online by commenting on the readings, writing op-eds or recording podcasts (individually or in team) on the online discussion platform. Online discussions will follow the topics of our sessions. The online discussion will open on Sunday in the week before the sessions and close on Saturday after the sessions.

Each student does a presentation on the topics of our weekly seminars. The task is to check the validity of theoretical approaches against the background of the puzzling empirical developments in the selected hybrid regimes of student’s interest (more details on the content will be provided in the first session and in the how to handout). The presentation should be done in teams of 2-3 students. The grade will be distributed between individual and group performance: 10% to 10% for each presentation. The presentation should be no longer than 20 minutes and will be followed by a 10-min Q&A. The presentation slides should be submitted to the instructor prior to the session. The preparations for the presentations should include additional literature to the required readings. The presentation will be usually scheduled on Thursdays.

Each student will design a research project dealing with a specific puzzle and question related to hybrid regimes. Against the background of contemporary research students are asked to formulate 2 hypotheses and with reference to methodological rules select the cases of hybrid regimes, either within a region or across the world or across the time, to test these hypotheses. The aim is to get first-hand experience with the research on hybrid regimes. The research project can be done on one of the (sub-)topics the presentation was done. The research project will be presented as a PowerPoint presentation of max 15 minutes (plus 10-15 minutes of the follow-up Q&A). The guidelines for the research design will be introduced in the first session of the first week. The presentations will be scheduled two times: in the mid-term (week 7) and to the end of the semester (week 12). Students should receive the approval of the instructor on their chosen topic for the research design by 01.03. This approval is mandatory.

The final paper will contain the final version of the research design, applied and tested empirically for the selected cases of hybrid regimes. It should be no less than 4000 words long and more than 5000 words long (without references, but including possible appendices). Details will be introduced in the first session of the first week.

Please note that for all assessments, late submission, and violation of the word or time limit will result in a lower grade. Plagiarism is not acceptable and will be punished according to the departmental rules.
**Deadlines:**
1. Choose the seminars you are going to present and country you take the role of an expert for – by 14.01
2. Get the approval of the (sub-)topic for the presentation – one week prior to the session in which you are going to present
3. Submit the presentation the day before the presentation is done at the latest.
4. Get the approval of the topic for the presentation of a research design – by 01.03
5. Submit the final paper – by 08.04

**Reading material**
All the course material is available in electronic form. The syllabus only contains the required (marked with*) and recommended readings. Suggestions for further reading will be made in class and consultations via email or office hours.
COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I: CONCEPTS AND MEASURES
In weeks 1-2 we will review approaches to conceptualize and measure hybrid regimes. Democracy-rooted approaches will be contrasted with autocracy-rooted approaches. Furthermore, approaches that handle these regimes as a genuine regime type will be considered.

Week 1 – Introduction: topics, requirements and organizational issues
The sessions in the first week introduces students to the topics of the course, explains course requirements and clarifies all organizational issues. In these sessions we will refresh the rules of concept building and start to explore the conceptual question: what hybrid regimes are (and aren’t).

Readings:


Week 2 – What is hybrid regime? Democratic and authoritarian paradigms. Genuine perspectives
Sessions in week 2 will be devoted to the approaches to hybrid regimes that are rooted in the concepts of democracy and/or autocracy. Also, we will discuss weaknesses and strengths of the democratic and authoritarian perspectives on hybrid regimes and explore novel approaches to deal with these regimes as a genuine regime type.

Readings:


PART II: FUNCTIONING AND IN-/STABILITY
In weeks 3-11 we will analyze the specifics in functioning of hybrid regimes that make these regimes endure or fail.

Week 3 – Why do some hybrid regimes survive while the other collapse? Conditions of revolutionary breakdowns and stability
In week 3 we will address the puzzle of stability and breakdown of hybrid regimes. In particular, we will elaborate debates between so called diffusion-centered and structural explanations.

Readings:


Week 4 – Why do autocrats need formal democratic institutions? Elections, Legislatives, Constitutions and authoritarian practices
In week 5 we will deal with interactions of formal democratic institutions and authoritarian practices. We will look at some examples how elections, legislatives and contribute to the stability of hybrid regimes.

Readings:


Week 5 – Sources and mechanisms of patronage
In week 6 we will deal with sources and mechanisms of patronage the incumbent rulers in hybrid regimes use to coopt their clients.

Readings:


Week 6– Repress or not repress? Coercion and civil society
Sessions in week 7 discuss the benefits and pitfalls of repression politics in hybrid regimes and the ways non-democratic incumbent rulers learned to manage civil society. In addition, we will also review the protest strategies of opposition and civil society in hybrid regimes.

Readings:


**Week 7 – Center and Regions. Subnational Political Regimes**

In week 7, we will deal with the power dynamics in the relationships between the center and the regions, which result in the variety of political regimes at the subnational level. Also, we will trace the consequences of these power dynamics on regime in-/stability.

**Readings:**


**Week 8 – Powers of media, symbols and ideas? Internal sources of legitimation**

Sessions in week 8 explore how media propaganda and ideologies contribute to stability of hybrid regimes.

*Readings:*


**Week 9 – External Environment and Actors**

In week 9 we will overview the external factors that contribute to or undermine the legitimacy, patronage and coercion of incumbents in hybrid regimes.

*Readings:*


**Week 10 – Authoritarian modernization mission impossible? Sources of bad governance and mechanism of policy-making**

In week 10, we will deal with policy-making, bad governance and modernization attempts in hybrid regimes.

*Readings:*

Week 11 – Civil Society and Opposition: Strategies and Successes Stories

In week 10, we will review factors and strategies of civil society and opposition in hybrid regimes which help them to survive and sometimes come to power.

Readings:


**Week 12 – Students’ Presentations, Open Questions, Topics of Students’ Interest**