

Section 1 – Democrazia e democratizzazioni

Panel 3. Economic Growth, State Capacity and Social Welfare in Contemporary Non-democratic Regimes

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The last part of 20th century saw a dramatic number of transitions toward democracy occurring all over the world – the so-called third wave of democratization. However, the early years of 21st century are often described as a period of authoritarian resurgence. Some democratic regimes are sliding back toward authoritarianism; several regimes that were initially described as experiencing a protracted and tortuous path toward democracy have in fact consolidated their status of pseudo-democracy; many of the extant autocracies are simply proving robust.

The resurgence and resilience of authoritarianism in Latin America, part of Asia, the communist space, and sub-Saharan Africa call attention to the social, economic and political performance of these new and old non-democracies. How do contemporary autocrats provide for the citizens? Are they able to build well-functioning bureaucracies and deter domestic violence, or are they intrinsically fragile? Are their economies growing? These ideas are not new. Machiavelli highlighted the importance of keeping the people satisfied (The Prince, Chapter XIX) in the 16th century. Many early examples of modern welfare programmes were launched in autocratic countries (Mares and Carnes 2009). Likewise, past works on the Arab rentier state, the Asian developmental state, and the Soviet social contract reveal that autocrats rarely behave as self-interested “roving bandits”. Moreover, a growing number of recent studies highlight that autocrats need to legitimize their power (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017) through a combination of claims that often include the government’s ability to improve the economy, strengthen the state apparatus, and provide public goods such as security and social services.

This panel aims to collect papers that explore from either a theoretical or empirical point of view (or both) the social, economic and political performance of contemporary non-democratic regimes. The call for paper is open to a broad range of methods, approaches, and case selection.