

## STV2350 exam, spring 2024

Short-answer questions: Answer **4 out of the 6** following short-answer questions.

*We recommend you spend approximately 10% of your total examination time on each short-answer question, meaning that the short-answer questions, combined, should take about 40% of your total time.*

1. Please name and briefly explain the “fundamental dilemmas” of autocratic rule.

*The three chapters in Svobik (2012) are the core readings on these two dilemmas, which were treated in depth in Lecture 3. Also the chapter by Wintrobe (1998) is relevant.*

*Specifically, the two main dilemmas, as posed in in the lecture, are*

*\*Problem of autocratic power-sharing (dictator and elites)*

*\*Problem of autocratic control (dictator and the masses)*

*We refer to the extensive Lecture notes from Lecture 3 for more developed considerations on these dilemmas (and their solutions), but describing the different relationships and highlighting what constitutes the dilemmas are core to a good answer.*

*Good answers list the three most important actors in an autocracy, list the elements of politics in autocracies and describe the two fundamental problems.*

*Very good answers will also highlight the inherent and tricky informational aspects that are related to these dilemmas.*

*Most important actors in autocracies are the dictator, the elites, and the masses. Bonus points for giving examples of types of elites and empirical illustrations (e.g. the “military in Myanmar”)*

*Key elements of politics in autocracies are*

- *Politics is informal => often unclear/intransparent rules; no or limited rule of law*
- *Possibility of violence => no protection from the state/dictator through laws and institutions means that politics often works under the threat of violence, e.g. repression, but also coup d'états, purges*

*The actors and elements of politics in autocracies give rise to the two fundamental problems:*

1. *The problem of autocratic power-sharing:*
  1. *The problem of autocratic power-sharing refers to the relationship between the elites and the dictator*
  2. *The dictator simultaneously fears and needs elites to govern, and elites fear the dictator (he can replace them, sometimes violently) but rely on the dictator for patronage and influence*
  3. *That means the dictator tries to accumulate power from the elites while the elites can threaten to oust the leader.*

4. *This threat depends on whether it's credible: it becomes less credible when (1) elites have little information about the dictator's action and motives and (2) when rebellion can fail, because of cooperation problems within the elite*
  5. *This problem gives rise to two equilibria: (1) contested power-sharing in which the elites credibly threaten to oust the leader (successful power-sharing) and (2) established autocracy (or personalized dictatorships) in which elites have little information about the dictator and the threat of a rebellion can fail*
2. *The problem of autocratic control*
1. *The problem of autocratic control refers to the relationship between the elites and the masses (and indirectly the military)*
  2. *Dictators don't know how large their popular support is so he fears popular uprisings*
  3. *As a result the dictator can equip the military with the means to quell popular unrest but that also means making the military strong, giving it potentially the means to oust the dictator (Svolik calls this the "moral hazard" problem)*
  4. *The conditions under which the dictator is willing to give the military so much power is when the threat of a mass uprising is credible, e.g. in large, young populations*
2. *Are some autocratic regime types more likely to initiate interstate wars than others? Depending on your answer, please explain why this is the case or why this is not the case.*

*The answer to the first question is "Yes", and in the course, the focus has mainly been placed on how and why personalist regimes are more likely to do so. Answers may focus on this regime type explicitly, contrasting it with others, but good answers focusing on other relevant distinctions between autocracies may also be rewarded insofar as arguments are clear and backed up by relevant references to studies/empirics. As for personalist regimes, the foreign policy lecture + Jessica Week's contributions on the curriculum go in depth on this question. Good answers here will discuss both the motivations of personalist dictators, the lack of constraints (so that their preferences are more easily put into action), as well as informational problems (ref. The dictator's dilemma under point b) which is crucial for understanding why war breaks out (following the bargaining model of war). Very good answers will exemplify, perhaps also going beyond the Russia/Putin example used in the lecture. Good answers might also note that war might be seen as a special case of policy failure (of which personalist regimes are particularly prone).*

3. *Briefly discuss two factors that research suggests would increase the probability of an autocratic country experiencing democratization.*

*There are several such factors, and clear arguments may be rewarded insofar as they point to relevant factors. Good answers should also point to relevant studies/empirics/broader arguments for how/why the factor influences democratization chances.*

*Some answers may point to more structural factors, such as low natural resource income or high GDP per capita/high levels of education.*

*From lecture 2:*

- *Income level/economic development*
  - *Modernization theory revisited!*
- *Economic crises*
- *Young democracy/past history of many regime changes*
- *Autocratic neighborhood*
  - *International factors, diffusion and regional «black knights»*
- *Weak state institutions, lacking rule of law, high corruption*

*Others may discuss triggering factors that are more tied to the process of democratization, such as*

(From Lecture 9: )

- *Non-violent mobilization by workers and the urban middle class increases the chances of democratization.*
- *Non-violent mobilization by peasants have little impact on democratization.*
- *Violent mobilization does not increase the chances of democratization.*
- *Whether coups are good for democracy is an open question (probably not in general).*
- *Some say coups in developed countries might be good, they may act as “triggers” forcing the regime out.*

*Different factors may thus be highlighted and rewarded insofar as the answers are discussed and justified with references to relevant studies on democratization.*

4. *What does Erica Frantz mean by a “continuous typology” of autocratic regime types? Moreover, please give an example of such a typology.*

*Different types of autocracy typologies, as classified by Frantz, were discussed in Lecture 1, and is treated in the Frantz book. The main distinction is continuous vs categorical typologies, where the former refers to a further categorization of autocracies according to (some principle that is correlated with) placement on an underlying democracy—autocracy scale. I.e., these typologies separate between more and less autocratic/democratic autocracies. (The categorical typologies use one or more other principles for subdividing autocracies that do not conceptually relate to degree of democracy.)*

*From lecture slides, lecture 1:*

*Continuous typologies based on elections*

- *Elections as a hallmark of democracy, but also in autocracies*
  - *Why autocratic elections?*
  - *Single-party vs Multi-party elections*
- *Schedler: Electoral authoritarian regimes vs closed regimes*
  - *EA: Multiple parties, but elections are still not free and fair as in democracies*
- *Levitsky and Way: Competitive authoritarian regimes:*
  - *Multiple parties and at least some degree competition*
  - *Some electoral authoritarian regimes are not competitive authoritarian*

*One relevant such typology is the Luhmann et al. (2018) Regimes of the World typology, which is on the curriculum. It separates between Closed autocracies and Electoral autocracies (but also between Electoral democracies and Liberal democracies).*

5. Describe at least two characteristics that have been common for many processes of democratic decline over the last couple of decades.

*Lecture 2 is the most relevant lecture here (although other lectures have also touched on relevant developments and points), explicitly noting discussions on how autocratization episodes of recent years have systematically differed from those of earlier years.*

*Key characteristics:*

*-Often driven by elected incumbent leader, autocratization from within (rather than military coups or other processes driven by actors outside government). Executive aggrandizement (Bermeo) and self-coups are often used as relevant terms for current incumbent-guided processes*

*-Often stepwise and gradual processes, democracy is picked apart piece by piece, often through small legal changes, and through small steps that individually are hard to clearly establish as anti-democratic.*

*-“Supporting pillars” of democracy often undermined first: attacks on media freedom, civil society organizations, autonomous judiciary, etc. Key is building down checks on executive power. Thereafter subtle manipulation of elections*

*-Processes often driven by incumbents who maintain a loyal support base, often “engineered” through polarization and creating external enemies (pitched as enemies also of democracy). So, anti-democratic behavior is thus often accepted by many supporters of the current incumbent*

6. What does the term “regime breakdown” mean? Moreover, briefly describe two modes of regime breakdown.

*Lecture 8 is relevant, but so is Lecture 1 (e.g., distinguishing between an autocratic spell and an autocratic regime spell) and Lecture 2. Good answers may start by venturing into a discussion of what constitutes a regime (a la Geddes et al. 2014/Djuve et al. 2020), noting that a regime is defined by the formal rules and informal norms of how leaders are selected and deselected. When these rules are overturned/removed/substantially changed, we have a regime breakdown (and when followed by new rules, we have a regime change). In other words, a regime breakdown is the end of a “regime spell”.*

*Good answers may note that autocratic regimes may break down and be replaced by another autocratic regime (or a democracy), and that democratization/autocratization are only subsets of regime breakdowns*

*Very good answers may discuss how it is sometimes hard to identify and date a regime breakdown, depending, e.g., on whether changes in rules for leader selection are deemed “substantial enough” for constituting a regime change.*

*From Lecture slide “What is breakdown?” in Lecture 8*

*Our definition distinguishes breakdown events from others*

- Leader change is not enough*

- *Fundamental change in the de facto rules/institutions for selecting the leader and keeping them in power*
- *In many regimes this also involves a change in the ruling elite*

*Modes of breakdown: Once again, see Lecture 8/Djuve et al (2020) overview Table 2, listing 14 categories, incl.:*

*Military coup, coup by other, self-coup, assassination sitting leader, natural death sitting leader, loss civil war, loss interstate war, foreign intervention, popular uprising, liberalization guided by sitting regime, directed transition, liberalization by actors outside regime,*

*Good answers not only lists but describes the modes. Very good answers may note that, in practice, several relevant processes/modes may take place at the same time, and be interrelated + contribute to the downfall of the sitting regime (e.g., a popular uprising may spur a coup, which is the direct trigger of the regime breakdown).*

Long-answer questions: Answer **1 of the 2** following long-answer questions

*We recommend you spend approximately 60% of the total examination time on the long-answer question that you select.*

### **LA1: Elections**

Use the knowledge you have obtained from STV2350 to critically reflect on and discuss different aspects of the following statement:

*“It is very paradoxical that the year 2024 is a record year in terms of number of the number of elections held globally, while we are most certainly in a dramatic period of autocratization, globally, where democracies are collapsing everywhere. Many of these elections are held in dictatorships or countries that are moving into dictatorship, and it makes no sense for dictators to hold elections. Elections only make sense in democracies.”*

*Different readings and lectures are relevant here, but especially lecture 5 on autocratic election and lecture 2 on autocratization are relevant. So is lecture 1 discussing how competitive/free and fair elections are a cornerstone of democracies (also conceptually), but that most autocracies today hold elections (that lack in competitiveness/freeness or fairness) and discuss characteristics of so-called electoral- or competitive authoritarian regimes.*

*The “paradox” described in the statement becomes less of a paradox, once one notes that also autocracies today hold elections.*

*The “makes no sense” part of the quote invites critical reflection on the many other functions that elections may have in autocracies than being a true competition for selecting leaders/governments.*

*Some of the core functions discussed in lecture 5 pertain to a) enhanced legitimacy (abroad and at home), b) gathering information (e.g., about opposition strength), and c) signalling power/deterring opposition by mobilizing the regime/state apparatus and*

followers during elections. Following Knutsen et al. (2017) these mechanisms may all be regime stabilizing in the long term for autocracies. As such, elections may “make a lot of sense” for autocrats trying to enhance legitimacy and preserve their own position as well as regime survival. Good answers may also highlight that elections can destabilize autocracies in the short term, and that the election year may be especially risky for the autocrat by creating a focal point/rallying signal for the opposition, for example.

Good answers may also moderate/nuance the statement that democracies are collapsing everywhere. As noted in lecture 2, the number of true democratic breakdowns in recent years remain fairly modest, despite the larger number of backsliding democracies with reduced democratic quality.

Very good answers will both be clear on conceptual distinctions (what is a democracy vs autocracy and elections vs competitive elections), clarify statements on “makes sense” to whom/in what regard (what are functions of autocratic elections), refer to relevant readings, refer to relevant empirics (both descriptive on current democracy trends globally and studies on the effects of autocratic elections), and very good answers might also illustrate the more general points with relevant empirical examples/cases.

## **LA2: Co-optation and repression**

Two core strategies that dictators use to ensure their political survival are co-optation and repression. First, give definitions of the two terms (“co-optation” and “repression”), and give specific examples of what such strategies can look like. Second, describe the goals that a dictator typically seeks to achieve with each strategy and how the strategies can be effective in achieving these goals. Third, describe potential pitfalls with each strategy. That is, describe how these strategies might backfire on the dictator.

Lecture 5 focuses generally on strategies for autocratic survival and co-optation, whereas Lecture 6 focuses on repression. We refer to the lecture notes for extensive discussions on these two concepts, the effectiveness of the strategies and potential for backfire

*Briefly:*

Cooptation: Lecture 5 and related readings (Frantz ch. 7, Gerschewski, Knutsen et al. 2018; Gandhi, Knutsen) are relevant

We should reward answers that give a clear definition of co-optation and that focus on the strategic calculus of providing resources to relevant actors.

The definitions of cooptation that were provided in the lecture were:

- intentional extension of benefits to potential challengers in exchange for their loyalty (Frantz, p. 111).
- the capacity to tie strategically-relevant actors (or a group of actors) to the regime elite (Gerschewski, p.22)

Those definitions contain the goals of cooptation, namely to tie elites to the regime and therefore lower the risk of a coup.

*What might go wrong:*

- *Difficult to maintain if regime runs out of money*
- *Individuals may use resources to strengthen themselves and usurp power*

Repression: *Lecture 6 is relevant. It provides a definition of repression as “actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against individual organization within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities” (Frantz 2018, Davenport 2007).*

*The lecture talks about two goals of repression (slide 11): (1) to control outside threats from the masses, and (2) to control inside threats from the elites/support coalition. Bonus points when answers name examples for each of these threats.*

*What might go wrong:*

- *Repression often amplifies grievances*
- *Repression makes preference falsification more likely (bonus points if students explain what preference falsification is): difficult for the dictator to gauge popular support because people might tell him what he wants to hear*
- *Repression may lead to backfire dynamics, both domestically and internationally*
- *Moral Hazard: equipping the military with means of repression enables them to better overthrow the ruler*