



Transitology Pathways to and from Democracy

MOOC Report
E-learning Department

Foreword

As a global actor, the Global Campus of Human Rights is committed to bolster the promotion of human rights and democracy and contribute strengthening democratic resilience by offering education and raising awareness on cutting-edge issues of contemporary concern and relevance, including the shrinking space for civil society, weakening of rule of law and increasing threats to democratic processes.

This course came about as a result of the collaboration between the Global Campus of Human Rights and Anja Mihr, DAAD Associate Professor and Academic Supervisor of the Master of Arts in Human Rights and Sustainability at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. Its aim was to increase understanding and public awareness of why and how countries transition to and from democracy, thus addressing urgent questions pertaining to the global erosion of liberal values and backsliding of democratic principles worldwide.

Course objectives included, among others, learning how to:

- analyse the political process and the difference between institution building and the consolidation of institutions
- detect and identify patterns and processes of consolidation of democratic (or autocratic) regimes and backsliding of democratic regimes
- name the different stages of consolidation and de-consolidation of political regimes
- outline the differences between electoral democracy and liberal democracy, between anocracies, authoritarian regimes, and autocracies
- recognise the specific role of citizens and civil society and that of awareness, behaviour, and belief in regimes
- assess case studies in countries and societies worldwide
- discuss any current political process of regime decline or strengthening of certain regime types.

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Introduction

Transitology is an analytical framework to analyse and assess political regime change and the subsequent consolidation process of democratic institutions. It explains the different pathways how democratic institutions and regimes slowly consolidate and strengthen over time; Transitology also explains why weak and corrupted democratic institutions fail and backslide into authoritarian political practices.

Regime change and the transition from one regime type and mode of governance to another do not say much about whether a regime is democratic or whether the rule of law, human rights, or good governance principles are adhered to. What consolidates and successfully transforms democratic institutions into 'stable democracies' are the **pathways of participatory, inclusive, and trustworthy adherence and compliance with democratic rules and human rights**.

At present, democracy is receding across the globe, while authoritarianism is growing stronger and more aggressive on the international stage. In such a challenging geopolitical context, understanding the causes and consequences of countries' transitions to and from democracy is essential to detect the early signs of democracy's weakening to contribute halting these processes.

In this MOOC, we aimed to give an answer to **critical questions**: how do countries and political regimes successfully democratise? What are the causes of democratic backsliding? How do democracies die, and how do they recover, if at all?

This report presents **data and analysis** on demographics, courseware, impact, highlights and recommendations.

The MOOC in a nutshell

Key information



20 Feb-16 Apr
2023



Open EdX



5+ h/week



Webpage



Teaser and social
media campaign



5 discussions,
5 quizzes, 2 polls,
2 surveys,
2 word clouds,
1 ranking exercise

A snapshot

Our lecturers



- **Anja Mihr**, DAAD Associate Professor OSCE Academy in Bishkek
- **Arusyak Aleksanyan**, Associate Professor Yerevan State University
- **Damir Kapidžić**, Associate Professor University of Sarajevo

- **Jacqueline Moudeina**, Right Livelihood Laureate 2011
- **Leonardo Morlino**, Emeritus Professor LUISS 'Guido Carli' University
- **Mozn Hassan**, Founder of NAZRA for Feminist Studies, Right Livelihood Laureate 2016
- **Pippa Norris**, Paul F. McGuire Lecturer at Harvard University, Founding Director of the Electoral Integrity Project
- **Thomas Millar**, DG-INTPA European Commission
- **Wolfgang Merkel**, Emeritus Professor WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Lectures and webinars



Interactive engagement

Name 3 words that describe a successful democratic transition process



Poll 1

Why do you think societies and people aim for a political regime change in their country?

Results

- Because they are directly affected by inequality and lack of opportunities **80%**
- Because they are dissatisfied with the economic situation **14%**
- Because they are tired of their politicians **6%**
- Because they are angry about the poverty **1%**

Three statements



Highlights

- **Cutting edge**, addressing challenging and pressing issues facing democracies
- **Academically rigorous and enriching**, introducing participants to the most relevant and up-to-date literature in the field of Democracy studies
- Contributions by **world-renowned academics** and experts
- **Hands on**, enabling participants to practice with relevant indicators and databases
- **Flexible and adaptable** to different levels of knowledge and learning needs
- **Transferable**, inspiring innovations in the curricula of other courses and programmes
- **Curated experience**, with scientific lead coordinating the course from beginning to end

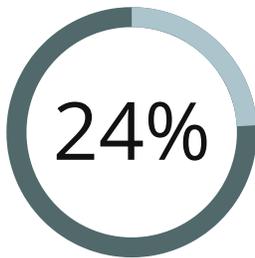


Professional profiles



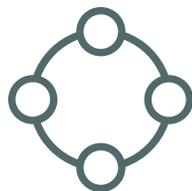
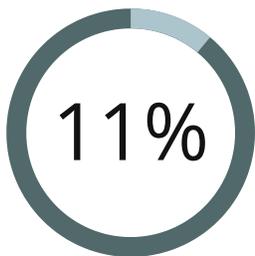
Students, researchers and education professionals

Half of the registered users who actively participated and answered the welcome survey was constituted by students (24%), researchers (18%) and education professionals (8%)



NGO Professionals

The second biggest group of active participants was made up of NGO professionals (24%)

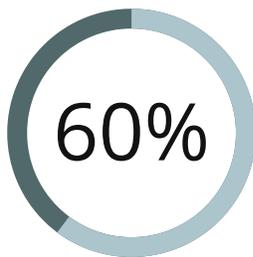


Staff of governmental and inter-governmental institutions

The course also caught the attention of staff of governmental (5%) and inter-governmental institutions (6%)

Audience

Inspiring also for well-versed participants



The majority of respondents found themselves already **well prepared** on the topic (60%). Many enrolled in the course because they enjoy learning about topics that interest them (40%), while others saw this course as a chance to complement their knowledge and skills (36%). From participants' comments, the course was also seen as a source of inspiration for further studies and research.

Expectations

The course would enhance my skills to analyse and contribute in the situation of my country as a country in transition. Currently Eswatini faces a political crisis which is characterised by calls for democratic reforms and silencing of dissenting voices by the regime. Having the political understanding will not only help me as a citizen but will also bolster my ability to contribute in building democratic institutions in my country.

I come from Sri Lanka. We came close to democracy after the end of a nearly 30 year conflict, but party politics prevented a rare shot at meaningful peace and reconciliation. Sri Lanka has since shifted to an authoritarian model of governance that is quite worrisome. I hope to learn more from this course about the reasons for the pendulum swinging back to authoritarianism and how I can keep the space for democracy open in my country.

A toolkit for understanding contemporary challenges

In their comments, many participants expressed the need to be better equipped to understand the political developments they observe in the countries where they live in order to contribute as informed citizens in protecting and supporting democracy in their respective contexts.

I am from new generation of human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan. We curious with the situation happening in Kyrgyzstan. I see how democratic institution are fallen. So I am here to learn about the transition from democratic way to authoritarian regime and how to save our country. I would like to promote the strengthening democratic institutions under authoritarian regime.

I live in Latin America and our political situation has been precarious, historically... I'm afraid for the future of my country and of the region as a whole, and thus I'd like to further my understanding on political transitions for both academic and personal reasons. I want to understand where my country might be at, where it might be heading, and where else It could go



I'm an international news correspondent working in Brazil, where serious threats to democracy emerged over the past four years. The society and institutions were able to fight back, but the social tissue is severely damaged. I want to better understand how this young democracy reached the verge of downfall

Enhancing practitioners' knowledge

For others, especially NGO professionals and staff of international organisations, the course was seen as an opportunity to gain additional knowledge and skills that could enable them to develop more comprehensive and effective strategies for supporting civil society and democratisation in transition countries. This demonstrates that the course did indeed fill a gap and respond to the needs of those who are most active in this area of work.

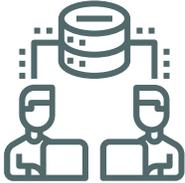
In my current position I need to assess political developments in the countries I support to develop strategies to support civil society that are working to strengthen their democracies. The skills and knowledge gained here will help me to better perform at my job and best support civil society actors that are working to strengthen the democratic institutions in their countries and ensure participation of all citizens.

I currently work in the area of Rule of Law in West Bank. I am hoping to gain theoretical insights from the course that will help me rethink the strategies my organisation has, as well as improve the impact of the programming in the mid- to long-term.

After the course, the general knowledge on the topic **increased** from the initial 5% (excellent) and 16% (very good) to 18% (excellent) and 48% very good.



Impact



The course introduced participants to the concepts of democracy, to the different regime types and modes of governance, presented various approaches to measure the quality of democracy and expounded the most relevant and up-to-date theories about regime change, democratisation and democratic backsliding. It merged **theory and practice** by giving participants the chance to practice with databases and indicators and making use of case studies.



By combining mandatory elements and optional food for thought, the course was **flexible** to different learning needs and speeds, enabling participants to meet the course learning objectives while, at the same time, providing inspiration to those interested in deepening specific issues of Transitology.



Given the high number of students and researchers in the course audience, it is no surprise that many found the course useful to inspire interest in the topic, steer future research and/or better prepare them for a **career** in the field of democracy support and assistance.

It has helped me refresh learnings from my Master's and inspired me to explore how democratic principles and techniques could be applied in my work (Community Feedback Mechanisms in humanitarian programmes)

Helpful and incredibly constructive presentations, lectures, interviews, webinars etc. have inspired me hugely and I hope to be able to continue my research of democracy issues and use knowledge that comes from this course in my teaching practice

From the final evaluations, it emerged that the course also helped participants to:

- Better understand the processes underlying democratic transitions and backsliding and analyse them in their own contexts and in comparative, cross-cultural perspective
- Develop critical thinking and analysis skills useful for future research and career prospects
- Engage with social and political issues and become active and informed citizens able to communicate effectively about current political developments and democracy
- Understand how their work is affected by the political situation in the country in which they operate

The learning that the Transitology – Pathways to and from Democracy course has given me has been to enable me to analyze political processes, the construction and deconstruction of institutions and democracy. It has helped me to identify the complexity of transit processes in the world's political regimes. Knowing the different phases of a transition has made it easier for me to understand many questions I had that I didn't know how to answer.

Working as a civic advocate in my home country The Gambia, a country on transition from dictatorship to democratic rule of governance. There were lot of issues of discussion that I and my colleagues implemented during the transition period, and still we keep eyes on implementing and making adjustments for ordinary citizens to have a good understanding of what transition to democracy means, and to understand the principles of democracy and the institutions that needs to be in place to support the democratic process.

I have been struggling to come to terms about the constant developments that I see in my country. But seeing almost every professor talk about democracy in India being on the backslide and contrasting these with other democracies of the world has helped me understand our predicament more.

Many participants from different backgrounds (e.g. development cooperation, education, translation, humanitarian assistance) also noted that their work practice and performance have benefited in various ways from this MOOC. This demonstrates that the relevance of Transitology extends well beyond the narrow community of political scientists and democracy practitioners and that the learning acquired through this course can inform and bring about positive change in different fields.

This course helped me to understand the principles of illiberal Populism which describes better the way African leaders and some leaders in some part of the world behave towards their population and what democracy means to them. This will help me definitely in my work to know how to avoid problems and to better adapt my organisation activities in such countries for my message to be more impactful

I think having the knowledge on the fundamentals on why there is currently a backsliding of democracy in the first place helped me gain new insights on on-ground approaches for development work

I learned about democratization and democracy backsliding, which help me in terms of translating books and articles related to politics and democracy

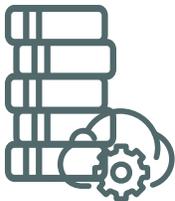
It helped on assessing governments that we work with on local integration or repatriation. On a personal level, having a critical understanding of democracy

I am an election expert practitioner and this knowledge has been beneficial to my understanding of the political and historic background of various countries and regions.

Recommendations from participants



- Respondents shows general satisfaction for the structure of the course, the quality of the learning content and material, and the variety of the experts involved. **Special praise went to Anja Mihr** for her professionalism and the ability to explain the course content in a very understandable and captivating way.



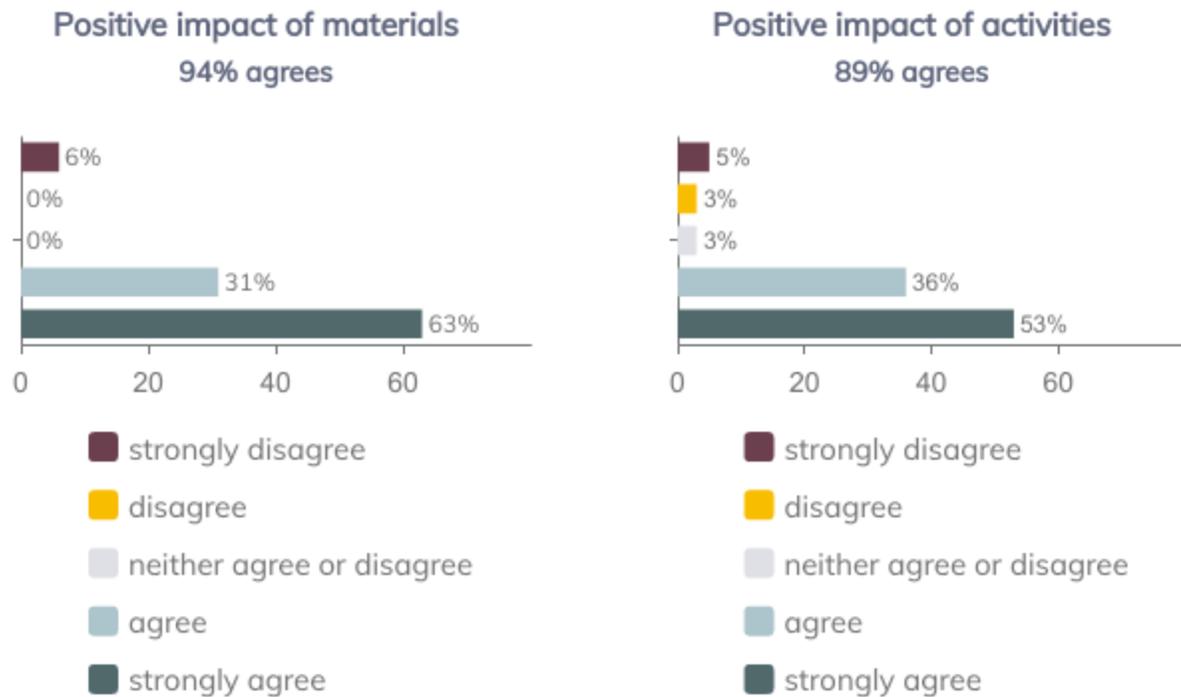
- Given the rich and intensive programme, some respondents asked to **allow for more time** to complete the course.
- Other remarks had to do with the complexity of the topics covered and the workload and some participants highlighted the need to **make the course content more manageable**.



- While greatly appreciating the opportunity to interact with and pose questions to experts via live webinars, some suggested to **follow up on possible unanswered questions** through the discussion forum in the MOOC platform.

Evaluation

Impactful materials and activities made participants give a **very high rating** and **top recommendation**.



94% gave 4-5*

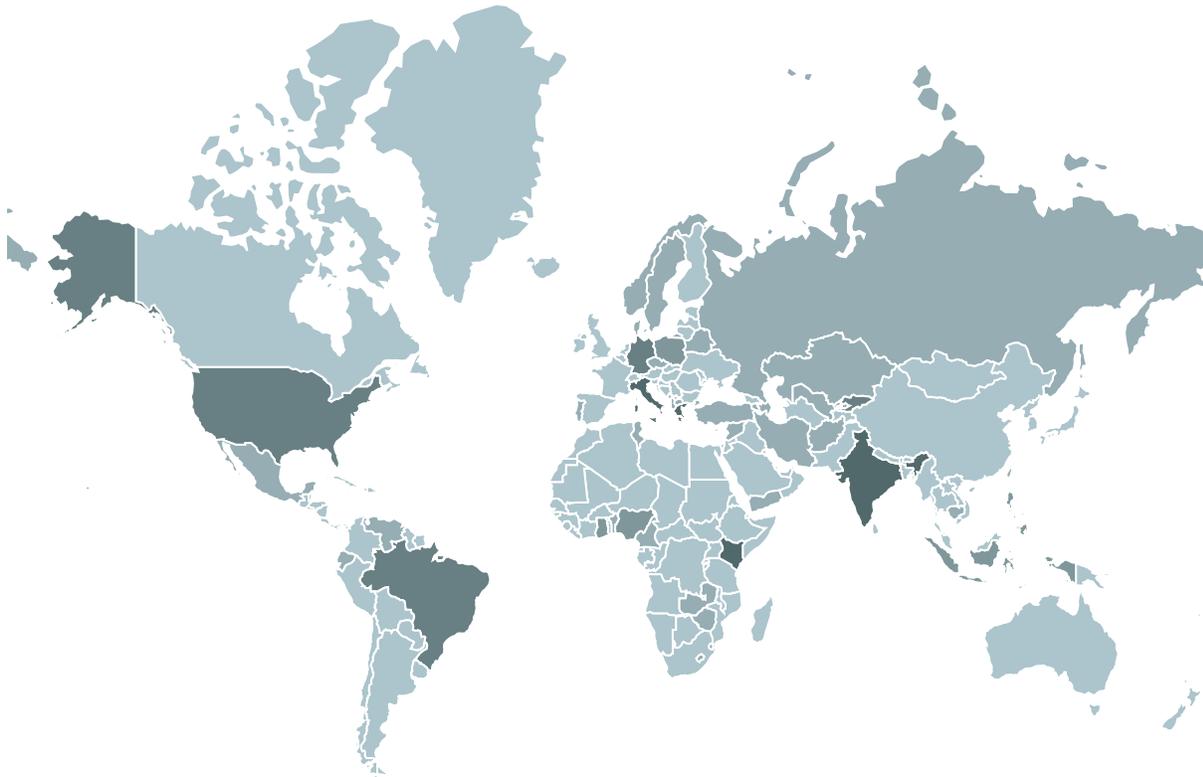
When asked to give an overall rating on a scale of 1 to 5, only 6% of participants gave 3*. The rest is shared between **34%** who **assigned 4*** and **60%** who **gave 5***.

95% would recommend

We also asked how likely they were to recommend the MOOC to a friend. If 2% would not recommend the course and 3% was neutral, the rest was **likely (11%), very likely (32%) and extremely likely (52%)**.

Certificates

Our certificates, awarded to those who completed all course requirements, reached **92 participants** in **47 countries** around the world.



816 Participants

11% Certificates

The course had a particularly high participation rate from Europe (41%). Other regions that fared well were Sub-Saharan Africa (16%) and Asia/Pacific (15%). Participation from Latin America (8%), MENA (5%), North America (7%), Central Asia (5%) and Southeast Europe (1%) was in line with previous courses.

The countries with the highest number of certificates were Italy (11), Greece (9), Kenya (6) and India (5).

Selected comments

Complementing knowledge and skills

As a political science student with an interest in political analysis, the analysis of democracy and everything regarding the transition and/or backsliding of it is very up my alley and I honestly think this course has taught me things that the curriculum in my university courses isn't able to fully get into (I would say for practical reasons such as there not being enough time). Therefore, I gained knowledge from this course I did not have, even as a 4th-year political science student.

Building cross-cultural understanding

Democracy and political systems vary across the world. Studying different pathways to and from democracy has helped build cross-cultural understanding and empathy, which is essential for professionals working in diverse environments

Fostering engagement with social and political issues

Studying pathways to and from democracy can provide a framework for understanding current social and political issues. As a student in humanities, this course has helped me engage with current events and become an active and informed citizen

By learning transitions and democratization processes that have taken place in Africa and other parts of the world, the course enabled me to become better equipped in understanding the factors that contribute to political backsliding and how it can be prevented. I can confidently engage in a discussion on transitions without fear.

The course leaves me with a lot of hope, having verified that the answer lies in civil society (national unity) and in agreeing with the rules, accepting them, and believing in them to act accordingly (habituation). Being aware that as long as there is social conflict and inequality there will be reasons to work for global democratization.

I see this course as a wake-up call for citizens to not take democracy for granted

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