

Call for Papers

for the conference

"Crisis in Authoritarian Regimes, Past and Present"

as part of the Humboldt-Princeton Project

"From Totalitarian to Authoritarian Rule: Comparing Dictatorships in Transition"

Date: June 5-6, 2020

Venue: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Organizers: Jörg Baberowski, Deborah Kaple

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Deadline: March 1, 2020

Crises reveal the fragility of political orders and the precarity of their future. When, in a crisis, the state of normalcy seems to vanish, the openness of future developments presents itself as a threatening variety of possibilities. Democratic and non-democratic regimes alike must cope with such phenomena of accelerated change in order to maintain stability and preserve their legitimacy. However, unlike electoral democracies, authoritarian regimes, possess fewer formal norms and institutions to ameliorate extraordinary circumstances and are thus especially prone to crisis. We therefore explore authoritarian strategies of conceiving, coping with, and evaluating crises to gain a better understanding of the functioning and stability of authoritarian orders.

For a long time, scholarship has focused either on democracies in crisis or on crisis-ridden authoritarian regimes that become democratic. More recent studies have turned towards non-democratic regimes, confining themselves, however, to a relatively narrow definition of crisis as a short and existential threat to rule. Crises, however, are phenomena of perception originating from individuals' assessments of a shifting situation. Thus, every crisis is open to contestation, culturally and historically distinct, and can appear in a broad variety of circumstances beyond or beneath the level of "regime crisis": for example, there can be political (legitimation, leadership succession, generational transfer), economic (financial, debt, consumption), societal (demographic, migration, unemployment), and ecological (natural catastrophes, food supply) crises.

Crises can be as different as the regimes that undergo them. In Ancient Rome, dictatorial rule was invoked as a temporary tool for crisis management that was supposed to disappear after an elected dictator had resolved the given crisis. Modern non-democratic regimes tend to be more durable, however, the more adaptive they are to shifts and challenges.

We welcome contributions from a broad range of fields such as history, political science, sociology, anthropology, and area studies, especially focusing on Africa, Asia, or Latin America, that may address (but are not limited to) one of the following aspects theoretically or empirically:

- *Perceiving crisis*: Political leaders try to anticipate extraordinary situations in order to properly react to them—they may detect a crisis where their fellow leaders see no threats; they may collectively neglect a looming crisis or even anxiously construct a state of imminence. In any case, crisis are phenomena of perception.
- *Timing crisis*: Crises may occur as short-term or long-lasting; they may remain latent or manifest clearly. In any event, crises are accompanied by a special notion of temporality, i.e. the acceleration of decline and the halt of progress.
- *Locating crisis*: Extraordinary situations may stem from within the echelons of power or from societal discontent; they may be triggered by exogenous or endogenous causes and affect the center and/or the periphery.
- *Shaping crisis*: Crises may represent critical turning points. Political regimes may originate from or fade in crises; they may strengthen their grip or lose power in times of crisis. Thus, crises appear as transitions from normalcy to states of emergency, from perceived stability to a threatening openness of future.
- *Learning from crisis*: By observing strategies of crisis management at home and abroad, political leaders can adapt their governance: they can gather crisis knowledge to avoid future challenges or improve the techniques of handling extraordinary situations; they may reshape the way of commemorating past crises to serve present political needs.

Please send an **abstract** (300 words) outlining your potential contribution and a **brief CV** to Martin Wagner (martin.wagner@hu-berlin.de) by **March 1, 2020**.

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