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**SEMINAR SERIES
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CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

HIGH COURTS AND AUTOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION: THE VENEZUELAN SUPREME COURT UNDER MADURO'S RULE

**FRIDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2018
6:00PM TO 7:15PM**

LEE SHERIDAN CONFERENCE ROOM, LEVEL 1, EU TONG SEN BUILDING, NUS FACULTY OF LAW (BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS)

ABSTRACT

The seminar discusses the role of high courts in the context of a political transition from competitive towards full authoritarianism. The use of high courts to entrench authoritarian rule in key ways – enhancing regime legitimation, bureaucratic compliance and social-control – depends on a series of non-exclusive factors, including regime features, the political context, institutional features of the judiciary and its composition. A transition towards a non-competitive authoritarian regime may involve significant costs for both rulers and judicial actors. Yet, the benefits might outweigh the costs: *Ceteris paribus*, a reliable, supportive high court in a dictatorial context can help governments solve internal conflicts; extract valuable information for policy-making purposes, and assist a growing repressive apparatus to carry out its mission. Despite its illegitimacy vis-à-vis political opponents and even the overall population, a high court could still enhance legitimacy to the eyes of pro-regime supporters. Moreover, counterintuitively, at a time of rising authoritarianism worldwide, a judicial system willing to collaborate with the government could help a flagging regime to bolster its claim it is stable, functional and with enough political influence to deliver credible commitments made with international allies, financial institutions and economic actors. I discuss these arguments in the context of contemporary Venezuela under Nicolas Maduro's autocratic rule (2013 - Current), a country where the Supreme Court functions as a 'judicial authoritarian enclave' – blocking opposition threats, disowning fundamental rights, supporting new policy solutions, providing key mechanisms to improve the regime's repressive capacity and enhancing regime legitimacy vis-à-vis internal and external allies. To these ends, the High Court went as far as invalidating the opposition-led legislature (National Assembly) and, in the face of mounting opposition pressure, support the openly unconstitutional creation of a constituent assembly to suspend (and possibly replace) the existing constitutional order.

SPEAKER



Raul Sanchez Urribarri is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Crime, Justice and Legal Studies at the Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University (Melbourne). He holds a PhD in Political Science (University of South Carolina), an LL.M. (Cambridge University) and a Law degree (Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, Caracas). His research focuses on democracy, rule of law and comparative judicial studies, with an emphasis on Latin America. His work has been published in journals such as *The Journal of Politics, Law and Social Inquiry* and the *Annual Review of Law and Social Sciences*, edited volumes and other outlets. He is currently working in a book project about informality and the rule of law focused on Venezuela.

Register here

<https://mysurvey.nus.edu.sg/EFM/se/543BE5C270645AB2>

(Registration starts at 5.30pm)

There is no registration fee but seats are limited. Closing Date: 2 November 2018

For enquiries, please contact Ms Poova at 6516 3644 or email us at clemail@nus.edu.sg.