

Authoritarian Regimes
POL-UA 595
Spring, 2019
Wednesdays, 8:00-10:30 AM

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The seminar will introduce students to the political science literature on authoritarian regimes, the most prevalent form of government throughout the global history. The course will focus on the following questions: What are the sources of political authority under authoritarianism? What institutional and power structures elites establish to further their interests? Why do political institutions differ across authoritarian regimes, and why does that matter? Why do some authoritarian regimes face popular insurrections, coups, and democratization, while others do not? How do authoritarian regimes manipulate public opinion through propaganda, biased media, and personality cults? How do democracies turn into autocracies? Can Europe and the United States turn into autocracies? By the end of the course students should be able to understand the basic principles of politics under authoritarianism. The course covers a wide range of historical and contemporary cases from Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

The setup: the length of each weekly meeting will be 2 hrs and 30 minutes. In the first part of the class, the instructor will give about 30-45 minute presentation outlining the literature and the existing knowledge about the given topic. We will then follow to discuss the required reading assignments for about 45 minutes, and will take a short 5 minute break. After the break, we will reconvene to hear and discuss student presentations.

The grading of student performance will be based on the following components:

Class participation and presentation (50%). Each meeting will cover a set of papers and book chapters. Typically, and when possible, the readings will include one or two "easier" (less "scientific") articles and one or two "harder" (more "scientific") articles. Students are expected to discuss the readings listed as 'Required.' Each student will have to make one 10-20 minute long in-class presentation about the reading materials listed in the syllabus as 'Presentation.' The presentations will be allocated based on the number of students taking the class and the difficulty/length of the assigned papers. In addition, your grade in this component will depend on your weekly participation in class discussions. While formally not required, students are strongly encouraged to read the articles assigned for presentations even if they are not presenting.

Analytical essay (40%). You will be asked to write one 10-page essay. Ideally, the essay should consider one particular problem related to the reading materials covered in the class and discuss the problem from the point of view of a certain case-study. Can the theories you learned explain some puzzling phenomenon in a particular historical or current case? What is missing in the given theories? Could we make informed/educated predictions about political developments in the analyzed case on the basis of the knowledge that you have accumulated? The objective of the essay is for you to apply general political science principles to a particular problem and demonstrate how well you mastered the course material. In the middle of the semester, we will discuss your chosen essay topics in the class. The essay will be due on the last class of the semester. Each student will give a brief presentation on their essay topic followed by questions and a brief discussion.

Book review/discussion (10%). You will have to read one book from the below list. During the pre-last class of the semester, we will have a book club-style discussion of book that you have read.

Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: The Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat*, Picador USA, 2001.

Kanan Makiya, *The Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, 1989.

Heraldo Munoz, *In the Dictator's Shadow: Life Under Augusto Pinochet*, Basic Books, 2008.

Peter Godwin, *The Fear: Robert Mugabe and the Martyrdom of Zimbabwe*, Little, Brown and Company, 2011.

Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*, 1935

WEEKLY TOPICS

1. 1/30 Introduction

Overview the course requirements, materials, and topics. Introduction to the basic concepts and questions. Assignments of in-class presentations.

2. 2/6 Analytical approaches and basic concepts

How does one analyze authoritarian regimes? What are the key principles of politics under authoritarianism?

Required:

Machiavelli N., *The Prince*, Chapter 17 "Of Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether it is Better to be Loved or Feared."

Wintrobe R., 1998, *Political Economy of Dictatorship*, Chapter 2 "The Dictator's Dilemma", pages 20-42.

Presentation:

Svolik, M. W. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 1 "Introduction" and Chapter 2 "The World of Authoritarian Politics"

3. 2/13 Leadership succession

Political survival is the ultimate incentive of all leaders, as we learn in week 2. In the absence of the electoral mechanism through which leaders are replaced in democracies, how do leaders get replaced in authoritarian states? We will try to understand why some leadership transitions are peaceful and others are not.

Required:

Nathan A.J., 2003, "Authoritarian Resilience: China's Changing of the Guard," *Journal of Democracy*,

14(1), pages 6-17.

A. Kokkonen and A. Sundell, "Delivering stability—primogeniture and autocratic survival in European monarchies 1000–1800," *American Political Science Review*, 108 (2014), pp. 438–453.

Presentations:

Hughes A., May R., 1988, "The politics of Succession in Black Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, 10(1), pages 1-22.

L. Blaydes and E. Chaney, "The feudal revolution and Europe's rise: Political divergence of the Christian west and the Muslim world before 1500 CE," *American Political Science Review*, 107 (2013), pp. 16–34.

4. 2/20 Political parties under authoritarianism

Political parties are among the most important instruments of political survival under authoritarianism. Why having a political party is important? Why some autocrats allow multiple political parties, while others permit only one official party?

Required:

McGregor R., 2012, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, Harper Collins e-books, Chapter 1 "The Red Machine: The Party and the State."

Presentations:

Gandhi J. and A. Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats", *Comparative Political Studies*, 40 (2007), pp. 1279–1301.

Greene K., 2010, "The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance," *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(7), pages 807-834.

5. 2/27 Personal rule

Why do some authoritarian regimes escalate to personalist dictatorships? How do personalist dictatorships work? What are the typical economic, political, and social consequences of the personalist rule?

Required:

Overy, R. 2006, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia*, Chapter 1 "Stalin and Hitler: Paths to Dictatorship", pages 1-53.

Reno W., 1997, "Sovereignty and Personal Rule in Zaire," *African Studies Quarterly*, 1(3), pp. 39-64.

Presentation

Svolik, Milan W. 2012, "The Politics of Authoritarian Rule". Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3, "And Then There Was One! Authoritarian Power-Sharing and the Path to Personal Dictatorship". Note: you are free to ignore section 3.2 (Formal Model).

6. 3/6 Personality cults and state propaganda

In their most extreme versions, authoritarian states create grotesque and bizarre machinery of propaganda and personality cults. The readings in this seminar are related to the previous "Personal rule" class but they focus on the nature of political discourse in authoritarian states, not so much the institutions. The key issue we will try to understand is why propaganda in authoritarian states "works," even if its substance is known to be writ large empty.

Required:

Wedeen, L., *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, University of Chicago Press, Chapter 1.

F. M. Marx, "Propaganda and dictatorship," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 179 (1935), pp. 211–218.

Presentations:

Huang H., Li Z., 2013, "Propaganda as Signaling", *Comparative Politics*.

Linan, Miguel Vazquez, "History as a propaganda tool in Putin's Russia", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 2010.

7. 3/13 Media bias, censorship, and misinformation

Information manipulation (quite distinct from propaganda) through biased reporting, censorship, and misinformation campaigns is a highly prevalent method to control and influence public opinion. This week we will learn what strategies authoritarian governments use for that purpose.

Required:

G. King, J. Pan, and M. E. Roberts, "How the Chinese government fabricates social media posts for strategic distraction, not engaged argument," *American Political Science Review*, 111 (2017), pp. 484–501.

Presentations:

Huang, H. 2017. "A War of (Mis)Information: The Political Effects of Rumors and Rumor Rebuttals in an Authoritarian Country." *British Journal of Political Science* 47(2): 283-312.

Rozenas A. and Stukal D., "How autocrats manipulate economic news: Evidence from Russia's state-controlled television," *Journal of Politics*, forthcoming.

8. 3/20 Spring recess

9. 3/27 Non-democratic elections

Most of authoritarian countries nowadays hold elections, even though most often these are not free and not fair elections with the outcome well-known before the votes are counted. What is the purpose of such institutional charade? What types of autocrats are calling elections and how do they run them?

Required:

B. Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006. Chapter 1 "Introduction"

Presentations:

Tucker J. 2007, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5(3).

10. 4/3 Coups, insurgencies, and civil wars

Quite often dictators rule by sword and consequently die by sword. These readings discuss how the ruling style of an authoritarian government is related to its eventual demise and what authoritarian leaders might be doing to prevent it.

Required:

Collier P., 2011, *Wars, Guns, and Votes*, Chapters 6 and 7, pages 141-166.

**Presentation of analytical essay topics. Students will be asked to provide a verbal 3-5 sentence explanation of an essay topic, which will be followed with questions, discussion, and suggestions as to how to proceed.

11. 4/10 Repression and violence

The authoritarian states vary a lot in terms of how much repression they use -- from mild ones to psychotic. The goal of this session is to understand what prompts governments to use political repression, especially at the mass scale, and what consequences does it have on the society, opposition, and the regime itself.

Required:

L. Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein*, Princeton University Press, 2018, Chapter 2 "Compliance and Resistance Under Autocracy"

Presentation:

E. Finkel, "The phoenix effect of state repression: Jewish resistance during the Holocaust," *American Political Science Review*, 109 (2015), pp. 339-353.

12. 4/17 Protests, revolutions, and democratization

Authoritarian leaders are often despised but citizens rebel against them much less often than one would expect. This week's readings try to understand why that is the case.

Required:

Cause, F. G. 2011, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, pages, 81-90.

K. Beissinger, "The Semblance of Democratic Revolution: Coalitions in Ukraine's Orange Revolution", *APSR*, 2013.

Presentation:

Kuran, T. 1991, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989", *World Politics*, 44(1), pages 7-48.

13. 4/24 Economic governance and performance under authoritarianism

Although authoritarian leaders typically have more space to maneuver the policy, often this presents more challenges than advantages.

Required:

PODCAST: Easterly on Dictatorship, Democracy, and Economic Performance:

http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2011/05/easterly_on_ben.html

Olson M., 1993, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development", *American Political Science Review* 87(3), pp. 567-576.

Presentations:

Overy, R. 2006, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia*, Chapter 10 "Commanding the Economy", pp. 392-440.

14. 5/1 Autocracy in America?

Is it possible for a consolidated democracy like the United States to turn into an autocracy? We will consider historical and contemporary evidence on this question.

Svolik M. and Graham M, "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States", *Working paper*, 2018

Levitsky S. and Ziblatt D., *How Democracies Die?*, 2018, Chapter 8 "Trump Against the Guardrails"

**Discussion of the books

15. 5/8 Student presentations

Presentations of the analytical essay projects. Each student should prepare a 5 minute presentation, which will be followed by questions and a discussion.