Authoritarian Politics  
Winter 2022  
PPHA 38765, PBPL 28765  
updated 1/3/2022

Instructor: Professor Alexei Zakharov  
Class Time and Location: Monday/Wednesday 1:20pm-2:50pm, Keller 0023  
Office Hours: Thursday, Friday 10:00am-12:00pm  
Certificate Program: Global Conflict Studies

Course Description

The goal of this course is to provide an understanding of undemocratic regimes — something that more than one half of the world’s population is forced to content with. We will start by looking at how authoritarian regimes differ from democracy and also from each other, proceeding to examine the threats that autocrats face, and the measures they take to maintain their rule, such as building or dismantling institutions, distributing patronage, hiring the right subordinates, manipulating public opinion, rigging elections, and suppressing dissent. Other actors, including opposition, face their own problems when contending with, or challenging, autocratic rule. We proceed to look at the ways in and out of the autocracies — how democratic rule becomes subverted, and how it is reestablished. We examine the impact of authoritarianism on economy and foreign policy, as well as on values, cooperation, and the fabric of the society, and whether and how these effects persist and reinforce authoritarian rule. Finally, we will look at the effect of technological change on the evolution of autocracies, as it can both empower citizens of autocracies, and strengthen autocratic control over them.

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following formula:

- 10% Course attendance and participation in class discussion
- 25% Individual paper memo
- 25% Group paper memo and presentation
- 40% Final exam

The task of the paper memo is to report on one or several papers from the required and recommended list. The memo should summarize and appraise the results, reflect on the contribution to the scientific debate and legacy (a good idea is to search for the most important academic papers published in the aftermath), and try to formulate one’s own research problem — think of the following question: “If I had an unlimited research budget, what would I do, and why?” The first memo assignment is individual, can focus on one paper, and be 4-5 double-spaced pages long. The second assignment, 7-8 pages, is to be done in groups of two or three, and should reflect on 2-3 papers, chosen by the students and subject to my approval. The second assignment must be presented to the class.

The final exam will consist of problems and essay questions and must be taken on the scheduled date.
Important deadlines

- January 18. Groups and themes for group paper memos and presentations should be selected.
- February 14. Individual paper memos are due.

All assignments are due at 23:59pm of the due date. Late assignments can be turned in with a 30% penalty before 23:59pm of the following date. Group essay is due the day before the scheduled presentation. Students are also encouraged to send slides in advance of group presentations; I will provide feedback on the slides if they are sent at least 3 days in advance.

Prerequisites

For BA students, one quarter of statistics (Stats 220 or equivalent) and concurrent or prior training in game theory (PBPL 222, Social Science Inquiry core, or equivalent) is recommended

Academic integrity

University of Chicago takes great pride in upholding the highest scholarly standards; as students, you are required to comply. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students; the instructor reserves the right to impose a zero grade on the assignment on question.

Student conduct, diversity, and inclusion

Learning is fun but requires an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect, recognizing and celebrating the diversity of our students along a broad range of factors. Please consult the University’s statement on civil behavior and the Harris School’s statement on diversity and inclusion here.

Classroom attendance

Students are expected to attend the course in person. Students who cannot attend the class in person due to extraordinary reasons (quarantine requirements, sickness, COVID symptoms or childcare disruptions) must contact the instructor to arrange recording of lectures.

Special accommodations

The University of Chicago, and we personally, support the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The University’s policies regarding students with disabilities are available here. If you have a disability accommodation awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office, you should inform the Harris Dean of Students Office by the end of the first week of class.

Required readings and course schedule

There is no required textbook for this course. Required and recommended readings will be assigned prior to each lecture and will be available on Canvas. There are no assigned texts for this course. All readings will be
available on Canvas. *This plan may be subject to change depending on how fast we progress.*

**January 4: Overview**

No reading

**January 9: Authoritarian regimes at a glance**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**January 11: Power sharing**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**January 13 (makeup for January 2): Elections under autocracy**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**January 18: Autocratic governance and leadership succession**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**January 20 (makeup for January 16): Repression**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**January 23: Autocracy and the military Required**


**Recommended**


**January 25: Information and propaganda**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**January 30: Information and propaganda (cont)**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**February 1: Economic outcomes of autocracy**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**February 6: Foreign policy under authoritarianism**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**February 8: Democratic backsliding**

**Required**


**Recommended**


Dimant, E., 2022. Hate trumps love: The impact of political polarization on social preferences. Available at SSRN 3680871.

February 13: Protests

**Required**


**Recommended**


February 15: Transitions to democracy

**Required**


**Recommended**


February 20: Civic society under authoritarianism

**Required**


**Recommended**


**February 22: The political psychology of authoritarianism**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**February 27: Autocracy in the information age**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**March 1: Group presentations**