Instructor: Professor Alexei Zakharov  
Class Time and Location: Monday/Wednesday 10:30am-11:50am, Keller 0010  
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 assignment
- 25% Group paper assignment and presentation
- 40% Final exam

The goal of the individual paper assignment is to write an essay (4-5 double-spaced pages or longer) on a topic related to the material covered in this course. The essay should be centered around a research paper. One way to structure it would be to present the conventional wisdom at the time when the results appeared, summarize and appraise the results of the research, and reflect on the contribution to our knowledge of the subject. A good idea is to look at the legacy of this research - search for the most important academic papers published in its aftermath, and check whether the results were eventually generalized, or if contradictory results were obtained. You can also try to formulate your own research problem — think of the following question: “If I had an unlimited research budget, what would I do, and why?”, describe policy implications of the results, and/or provide a case study that you think illustrates the results. Unless by my approval, the paper has to be an original research paper (not a book or lit review) published since 2010 in top 3 political science journals
(APSR, JOP, AJPS), or in top 5 economics journals (QRE, AER, Econometrica, JPE, RES); it cannot be one of the required/recommended papers on the class reading list.

The group assignments will be done in groups of 2 (for masters students) or 3-4 (for undergraduate students); you’ll have to write an essay (7-8 double-spaced pages or more) covering 2-3 research papers centered around a single theme (the papers and theme are subject to my approval). You also will have to make a 10-15 minute presentation. Think of it as a continuation of the lectures; there are many interesting topics that you can present on which could not be covered because of time constraints.

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

### Important deadlines

- April 16. Individual paper assignments are due.
- April 24. Groups and themes for group paper assignment and presentations should be selected.
- May 14. Group paper assignments 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. 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.

March 20: Overview

No reading

March 22: Authoritarian regimes at a glance

Required


Recommended


March 27: Power sharing

Required


Recommended


Gandhi, J. (2008) *Political institutions under dictatorship*, Ch. 3


March 29: Franchise extensions

Required


Recommended


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**April 3: Elections under autocracy**

**Required**


**Recommended**


April 5: Autocratic governance and leadership succession

**Required**


**Recommended**


Baturo, A., 2017. Democracy, development, and career trajectories of former political leaders. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(8), pp.1023-1054.


April 10: Repression

Required


Recommended


April 12: Autocracy and the military

Required


**Recommended**


**April 17: Information and propaganda**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**April 19: Autocracy and the economy**

*Required*


*Recommended*


April 24-26: Democratic backsliding

**Required**


**Recommended**


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


Ross, M.L., 2015. What have we learned about the resource curse?. *Annual review of political science*, 18, pp.239-259.


**May 1: Protests**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**May 3: Civil society under authoritarianism**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**May 8: The political psychology of authoritarianism**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**May 10: Autocracy in the information age**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**May 15-17: Group presentations**