Politics of Authoritarian Regimes
Spring 2024
PPHA 38765, PBPL 28765
updated 3/15/2024

Instructor: Professor Alexei Zakharov

Class Time and Location: Monday/Wednesday 9:00am-10:20am, Keller 0007 (38765); Monday/Wednesday 4:30pm-5:50pm, Keller 0023 (28765)

Office Hours: Thursday 10:00-11:00am, 2:00pm-3:00pm; Friday 10:00am-12:00pm, Keller 2083

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 contend 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 the 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 re-established. We examine the impact of authoritarianism on the 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 empower citizens of autocracies but also strengthen autocratic control over them.

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following formula:

10% Course attendance and participation in class discussion

20% Individual paper assignment

5% Peer review of group 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. I do not require you to write a policy recommendation; but if you think that it follows from the results of the papers you are discussing, then it is a good idea to include it. 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 (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). The group assignment cannot be on any of the papers used for individual assignments of any of the team members. You also will have to make a 10-minute presentation. Think of it as a continuation of the lectures; there are many interesting topics that you can present that were not be covered in the course because of time constraints. You will also have to write a one-page appraisal of a group assignment.

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

**Important deadlines**

- April 15. Individual paper assignments are due.
- April 22. Groups and themes for group paper assignment and presentations should be selected.
- May 1. Draft group papers are due.
- May 8. Peer reviews and draft presentations are due.
- May 15. 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. Please expect the assignments other than the final exam to be graded within one week of the due date.

The final exam dates are:

- PPHA 38765: May 22, 9:00-11:00am, Keller 0007
- PBPL 28765: TBA

**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 must 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 in 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 before 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 18: Overview

No reading

March 20: Authoritarian regimes at a glance

Required


Recommended


**March 25: Power sharing**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**March 27: Franchise extensions**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**April 1: Elections under autocracy**

**Required**


**Recommended**


### April 3: 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 8: Repression

**Required**


**Recommended**


**April 10: Autocracy and the military**

*Required*


*Recommended*


**April 15: Information and propaganda**

**Required**


**Recommended**


**April 17: Autocracy and the economy**

**Required**

**Recommended**


**April 22, 24: Democratic backsliding**

**Required**


**Recommended**


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


April 29: Protests

Required


Recommended


**May 1: Civil society under authoritarianism**

**Required**


**Recommended**


May 6: The political psychology of authoritarianism

**Required**


**Recommended**


May 8: Autocracy in the information age

**Required**

Recommended


May 10-12: Group presentations